Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation

جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية «الرأي»

Volume 23 Number 6826 | AMMAN THURSDAY-FRIDAY, APRIL 30-MAY 1, 1998, MUHARRAM 3-4, 1419 | Price: Jordan 200 fils

Palestinian stabbed in Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — A Palestinian was slightly wounded on Wednesday after being stabbed in the back by an unknown attacker in an ultra-Orthodox district of Jerusalem, police said. The injured man was treated at a medical centre while police searched for the attacker. He is the fourth Palestinian to suffer an attack in the Mea Shearim district, but no-one has yet been arrested.

Five SLA militiamen wounded in attack

MARJAYOUN (AFP) — Five militiamen from Israel's allied South Lebanon Army were wounded late Wednesday in a Hizbollah guerrilla attack in the occupied border zone in south Lebanon, security sources said. The militiamen were injured when guerrillas fired rocket propelled grenades and machine-guns on an SLA post near the village of Tair Harfa in the western sector of Israel's self-declared "security zone," the sources said. A spokesman for the Islamic Resistance, Hizbollah's military arm, confirmed the attack, saying guerrillas opened fire on an SLA patrol entering the Tair Harfa post. Hizbollah spearheads the guerrilla war to force Israel out of southern Lebanon, where it maintains a so-called "security zone" to protect its northern territories from cross border attack.

King, Danish prime minister discuss stalled peace process

'Palestinian leaders are operating with almost impossible conditions'

AMMAN (J.T.) — Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor on Wednesday wound up a three-day official visit to Denmark and left for Tunisia, the third leg of a tour which took them to Germany and Denmark.

At a meeting with Danish prime minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, attended by His Royal Highness Prince Ali and the accompanying Jordanian delegation, King Hussein told a press conference in Copenhagen that the European Union should play a stronger role in the peace process to support the main sponsor, the U.S.

The King stepped up pressure on Israel ahead of talks between U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Alhright with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu in London next week.

"The London meeting is a very crucial step in the peace process. In case of failure, the development will be very serious," AFP quoted the King as saying.

Stressing the need for Israel to take advantage of the present opportunity to establish regional peace, King Hussein said: "I believe it is easy to make impossible demands but it is much more worthy of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli government to realise that it is time to give."

"We are approaching a crossroad and I hope that we will take the right course, the right path to continue the peace process," the King added.

Noting that the Palestinians have done all they can to rescue the peace process, King Hussein voiced hope that things will change, saying: "I honestly cannot see what more Palestinians can do or give."

"Palestinian leaders are operating with almost impossible conditions," he said.

The King's talks with the Danish premier focused on the peace process and ideas to bridge the gap between the Palestinians and Israelis.

In addition, King Hussein and Mr. Rasmussen stressed the need to put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people and to avoid any attempts to create a new crisis.

The King also visited the parliament where he was received by Speaker Evar Hansen and representatives of Danish political parties.

King Hussein briefed party leaders on the peace process, and the obstacles facing it, particularly on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

He called for intensifying all efforts to put the peace process on track again.

Upon departure from Copenhagen, King Hussein and Queen Noor were seen off by Queen Margarethe II and her husband Prince Henrik, royal family members, Mr. Rasmussen, and cabinet ministers in addition to senior Danish officials.

King congratulates Regent, Jordanians on Hijri new year

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein on Wednesday sent a cable to His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, in reply to a cable the Crown Prince sent to His Majesty on the occasion of the new Hijri year. King Hussein congratulated the Regent and the Jordanian people on this dear occasion.

THE HAJJANEH BRING TRADITION TO COPEX: Units of hedouin troops on camels (Hajjaneh) taking part in a show during the two-day military exhibition, COPEX on Wednesday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Arafat accepts U.S. compromise

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat stepped up the pressure on Israel Wednesday by accepting a U.S. compromise proposal for West Bank troop withdrawals which Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu has defiantly rejected.

Mr. Arafat confirmed for the first time that Washington's package peace proposal would require Israel to withdraw from an additional 13 per cent of the West Bank and said he accepted this.

The Palestinian leader said his decision marked a major compromise since his reading of interim peace accords signed with Israel should have required it to withdraw from another 40 per cent of the West Bank by this stage of the process.

"Under the agreement, the... redeployment was supposed to be from 40 per cent of the West Bank. Then it was lowered to 30 per cent, then to 13 per cent," Mr. Arafat said during a press conference with visiting Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa.

"We have accepted this, working from a positive position. We don't want to leave any chance for [Netanyahu] to escape implementation," he said.

Details of the U.S. plan have been widely leaked, although Washington has carefully avoided making it public since this would be widely seen as putting pressure on Mr. Netanyahu's government. Israel has categorically rejected the 13 per cent pullback figure.

Mr. Arafat said for the first time last week that he welcomed the U.S. proposals in principle, but made no mention the scope of the mooted troop withdrawal.

Wednesday's statement increased the isolation of Mr. Netanyahu ahead of separate meetings Monday in London between the two leaders and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

U.S. special Mideast envoy Dennis Ross has held five meetings with Mr. Netanyahu since Saturday but has failed to persuade him to accept the U.S. plan and Israeli media reports said their talks have been increasingly tense as the London meeting approaches.

Mr. Ross met with Palestinian negotiators Wednesday afternoon and was due to see Arafat.

U.S. Vice President Al Gore will add his weight to the negotiating effort when he arrives in Israel Thursday to attend celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Israel's creation.

The U.S. package would link a staged Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank to specific Palestinian steps against Islamists and to a slowdown in Jewish settlement building in occupied areas.

Once this was agreed, the two sides would launch long-overdue negotiations on a final peace agreement which according to the Oslo interim accords should be concluded by May 4, 1999.

Mr. Netanyahu's right-wing government has reportedly offered to yield another 10.8 per cent of the West Bank at this stage but only on condition that Mr. Arafat first meet a long list of security demands.

Mr. Netanyahu is also insisting that Palestinians agree to forego a second troop withdrawal which Israel is supposed to carry out later this year under a U.S.-brokered January 1997 interim peace accord.

The Israeli leader wants this pullback to take place only in the framework of a final peace accord but the Palestinians have refused and Washington is backing them.

Mr. Netanyahu responded defiantly to the growing pressure to accept the U.S. compromise, which is fiercely opposed by hardliners in his government.

"If I don't capitulate to these demands will I be branded an obstacle to peace?... Of course I will. So what?," Mr. Netanyahu declared Tuesday.

"We're willing to be flexible in areas that are difficult for us, but it cannot be that Israel is expected to do things that will sacrifice and endanger its security," he said.

"We've stretched ourselves to the limit, beyond our limit," he said.

Mr. Netanyahu's outburst came after he travelled to Cairo Tuesday in an unsuccessful bid to enlist Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's help in convincing Mr. Arafat to accept a smaller interim withdrawal.

Mr. Mubarak told him the U.S. plan was the only way to advance.

Musa says Netanyahu using security issue to block peace process

GAZA CITY (AFP) — Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa accused Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu Wednesday of using arguments about Israel's security concerns simply to avoid the painful decisions needed to make peace.

"This argument about security has become an argument that is increasingly unacceptable to many countries in the world because we all know that security comes only with peace," Mr. Musa said at a joint press conference with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

"We all know that security comes only with peace. The absence of peace means the absence of security," he said.

Mr. Musa was responding to Mr. Netanyahu's refusal to accept U.S. compromise proposals aimed at ending more than a year of deadlock in peace efforts and getting Israelis and Palestinians to begin negotiations on a final peace agreement.

Mr. Musa also threw his support behind threats by Mr. Arafat to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state if negotiations with Israel remained deadlocked by the time the Oslo interim peace accords expire on May 4, 1999.

"President Arafat is right to say that at a certain moment a Palestinian state will be declared," he said. "History tells us there are things you cannot stop."

Mr. Netanyahu warned on Monday that Israel would respond with its own unilateral moves if Mr. Arafat tries to declare a state.

He did not elaborate but the threat was widely seen to imply Israel would reinforce its hold on or simply annex parts of the West Bank. He also warned that a unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence would "dissolve the Oslo accords."

Kingdom marks Labour Day

Regent discusses workers' concerns with union leaders

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, received at the Royal Court Wednesday a delegation representing the professional and labour unions and extended his good wishes to them on the occasion of Labour Day.

At the meeting, which was attended by Minister of Labour Mahdi Farhan, the chairman of the Amman Chamber of Industry, Khaldoun Abu Hassan, and the chairman of the Federation of Jordanian Chambers of Commerce, Haidar Murad, the Regent and his guests discussed workers concerns and proposed solutions to labour-related problems.

The discussion also dealt with developing cooperation between employers and employees, amending legislation related to labour and increasing production.

Jordan is marking Labour Day today which is a public holiday.

JTC, FLAG to sign accord this week

'Linking Kingdom to fibreoptic highway should be within a year'

By Ahmed Naser
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — After four years of negotiations and ironing out political obstacles, the Jordan Telecommunications Company (JTC) and Fibreoptic Link Around the Globe Limited (FLAG) are expected to sign an agreement in the first week of May to link the Kingdom to the Fibreoptic super highway.

According to JTC director general, Mamoun Balqar, JTC had entered the final stage of negotiations in mid-April with FLAG's two representatives, General Council Stewart Rubin and Treasurer Larry Batista, and that current reviews of the contract were centred round the "period of implementation."

Project implementation, he said, "should not be more than a year."

Sources that asked not be named, told the Jordan Times that the project implementation includes the installation of equipment that would link FLAG's Fibreoptic cable linking southeast Asia with Europe through the Suez Canal via a branching unit in the middle of the Red Sea to Aqaba.

Sources added that the JTC-FLAG contract was worth $18 million and that operational and maintenance costs would reach $1 million annually for unlimited traffic. Fibreoptic cable carries data-communications transmission, phone calls and television and radio broadcasts.

The branching unit, linked to FLAG's cable which rests on the Red Sea bed, lies 175 kilometres south from Aqaba.

The deal also involved Egypt as the 28,000-kilometre cable from London to Tokyo passes through Egyptian territorial waters.

"His Majesty King Hussein is working towards making Jordan a regional communication hub and this project [the FLAG landing] is the tool by which the Kingdom will be linked to the world's super highway," former minister of post and Telecommunications, Bassam Saket, told the Jordan Times.

"Reducing the political obstacles that were present was essential to the project's launch," he noted.

FLAG is owned by Bell Atlantic (U.S.), Dallah Al Barakah Group (Saudi Arabia), Telecom Holding Co. (U.S.), Marubeni Corporation (Japan), Asian Infrastructure Fund (Hong Kong) and Gulf Associates Incorporated (U.S.).

Moreover, FLAG has fibreoptic landings in: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, Korea and Japan.

In addition to the proposed landing in Aqaba, a second landing is under work in Saudi Arabia.

Saddam examines U.N. ties after renewal of sanctions

BAGHDAD (AFP) — President Saddam Hussein chaired a meeting of the Iraqi leadership on Wednesday to examine ties with the United Nations after its renewal of economic sanctions, the official news agency INA said.

The meeting, which grouped the decision-making Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and the ruling Baath Party, discussed the Security Council's decision on Monday to keep the sanctions in place.

On April 16, the Iraqi leadership called for an immediate lifting of the sanctions and warned that Baghdad's patience was running out with the embargo, which has been in force since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

INA said the new meeting was called to discuss a report from Foreign Minister Mohammad Said Al Sahhaf who held an informal meeting with the Security Council members during their review of the sanctions.

UNICEF warns sanctions harming children

PARIS (AFP) — UNICEF warned Wednesday that continued sanctions against Iraq could harm the health of its children. Carol Bellamy, executive head of the U.N. agency, said at a press conference that in Iraq "the health condition of children has deteriorated dramatically during the course of the sanctions." "That being said, however, [the sanctions] can be used by the government to not respond" to health problems, she added. "The government has a responsibility too. The government can't hide behind saying: "It's all the fault of the sanctions." "In New York, the U.N. Security Council on Monday extended the almost eight-year sanctions against Iraq which can only be lifted when all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction have been eliminated. The council acknowledged progress in the nuclear area, but said that Iraq's disclosures on its biological and chemical weapons programmes were still incomplete.

An official Baghdad newspaper, Al Thawra, on Wednesday criticised the renewal of sanctions but steered clear of making threats of a new crisis in ties with U.N. weapons inspectors.

"Member and non-member countries of the Security Council have a moral responsibility to oppose any new unjust stand" against Iraq, said Al Thawra, the Baath Party's newspaper.

In New York, Mr. Sahhaf on Tuesday also stopped short of making concrete threats to halt cooperation with weapons inspectors of the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) which is in charge of disarming Iraq before sanctions can be lifted.

"They should take seriously the statements issued by the leadership of Iraq," he said. "Our demand is lifting sanctions now, if there is any justice in this Security Council."

Last Thursday, the Iraqi cabinet warned that a decision to prolong sanctions would lead to "a new situation... and the international community must assume its responsibility."

But asked whether Iraq was planning any retaliatory measures, Mr. Sahhaf struck a conciliatory tone.

The foreign minister pledged that Iraq would provide "more facts and figures to the international community" on proscribed Iraqi weapons programmes to speed up the sanctions lifting.

The Security Council review followed a report from UNSCOM chief Richard Butler that "virtually no progress" had been made over the past six months, a period of crisis in relations between the two sides.

U.S. hails relief shipment to Iraq

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The White House hailed the delivery of the first shipment of U.S. humanitarian aid to sanctions-hit Iraq Tuesday but said it was "deeply disturbed" with Baghdad's interference with U.N. aid programmes.

"The mission... reflects the concern of the government and the people of the United States for the welfare of the Iraqi people," the White House said in a statement.

The U.S. charity AmeriCares delivered some 35 tonnes of aid to ease the effects of the embargo slapped on Iraq for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The aid, which included mostly medical supplies for children's hospitals, was flown to Iraq under a U.N. exemption to an air traffic embargo which forms part of the sweeping sanctions. AmeriCares says it received assurances from Iraq that only needy civilians would receive the aid and the military would not benefit.

Iran told U.S. it would back Israeli pullout from Lebanon — Beilin

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Iran has discreetly told the United States it was ready to back Israel's proposal to withdraw its forces from the buffer zone they occupy in south Lebanon, an Israeli opposition leader said Wednesday.

Yossi Beilin, a former minister from the Labour Party, told Israel Radio of the purported Iranian stance after meeting in Washington and New York with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

He provided no further details.

The Israeli government this month adopted a 20-year-old U.N. resolution, number 425, calling for it to withdraw its forces from Lebanon.

But it conditioned the pullout on Lebanon agreeing to guarantee the security of Israel's northern border from attack by Islamists and others who have been battling Israeli occupation forces.

Lebanon and its Syrian patron have rejected the proposal, saying Resolution 425 requires an immediate and unconditional withdrawal.

But Lebanese President Elias Hrawi said last week that he would be willing to negotiate security arrangements for south Lebanon with the United Nations, though not directly with Israel.

Israel's Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu is due to discuss the Lebanon issue with Mr. Annan on May 15 in London.

Mr. Beilin, who has spearheaded calls in Israel for a unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon, also said the United States had expressed a willingness to contribute troops to an eventual international peacekeeping force in areas evacuated by Israel.

Revolutionary Guards chief threatens to crack down on liberal dissent

TEHRAN (AFP) — The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, General Yahya Rahim Safavi, has threatened to crack down on a wave of internal dissent and criticism saying it jeopardised the country's security, newspapers said Wednesday.

"Newspapers are published these days which are threatening our national security. They contain the same material as American newspapers," said Gen. Safavi in a public speech Monday in the holy city of Qom, central Iran.

"Liberals have entered the foray with cultural artillery. They have taken over our universities and our youth are now shouting slogans against despotism," he was quoted as saying by Jameeh and Hamshahri, both moderate newspapers.

"We are seeking to root out anti-revolutionaries wherever they are," the general added. "We have to behead some and cut off the tongues of others. Our language is our sword. We will expose these cowards."

The general was referring to the new open atmosphere prompted by the election last May of President Mohammad Khatami. The new government has allowed a record number of independent publications and some expression of dissent in the street.

He notably criticised Culture Minister Ayatollah Mohajerani, a reputed moderate, and the interior ministry, which is also of headed by a liberal-minded reformist.

"I spoke to Mohajerani and told him his way was threatening the national security. Do you know where you are going?" Gen. Safavi reportedly said.

Ayatollah Mohajerani said in a public meeting on Tuesday that "no one has the right to suppress a thought just because he is opposed to it. Human beings are born to think."

The general also linked the interior ministry to a wave of strikes in a central Iranian town in recent weeks protesting against the house arrest of dissident cleric Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri.

The general also criticised Mr. Khatami for calling for dialogue with the West and for pledging to work ease tension with the outside world.

"Can we withstand American threats and domineering attitude with a policy of detente? Can we foil dangers coming from America through dialogue between civilisations?" he asked.

"Will we be able to protect the Islamic republic from international Zionism by signing conventions to ban proliferation of chemical and atomic weapons?" Gen. Safavi added.

An abridged version of his speech published in newspapers on Tuesday did not contain these direct attacks.

Salam, an Islamic leftist newspaper, did not publish Gen. Safavi's remarks, but warned that they amounted to "taking sides in the country's political developments."

The armed forces are banned under the constitution from interfering in politics.

But the general said the Revolutionary Guards had had a political and ideological agenda since its creation after the 1979 Islamic revolution to safeguard the regime.

Mr. Khatami's landslide win has sharpened the dispute between the conservative faction and a reformist coalition of Islamic moderates and leftists.

The president vowed last week to defend the right to freedom of expression, "even that of my own critics."

35 PKK rebels killed in Turkish offensive

DIYARBAKIR (AFP) — Thirty-five members of the Kurdish rebel movement PKK have been killed in a Turkish army offensive, military officials said Wednesday.

More than 40,000 troops were mobilised for the operation, which began at the weekend and was continuing in the eastern and southeastern provinces of Elazig, Bingol, Mus and Diyarbakir.

With a general at its head, the offensive was the largest since the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) started an armed rebellion against Ankara in 1984.

Three security agents were killed in clashes and eight rebels were captured with their weapons during the operation, the sources added.

The army has regularly launched major offensives in the spring to try to keep PKK forces from regrouping after the winter season.

More than 29,000 people have died since the PKK took up arms against Ankara in 1984 to fight for a Kurdish homeland.

A Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) soldier stands next to prisoners of war shortly before the prisoners (Sudan government soldiers) were released at Jigomoni in southern Sudan. Large parts of southern Sudan are reported to be hit by famine but fighting between the SPLA and the Islamic government in the north continues (Reuters photo)

Sudan opposition urges boycott of constitutional referendum

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan's southern rebels and northern opposition have urged a boycott of a planned referendum on a draft constitution which the government intends to put to the people from Friday.

A Khartoum daily on Wednesday said it had carried out a poll suggesting that almost half of the eligible voters approve of the new measure, which is ambiguous on the role of political parties.

The electoral body set up by the Islamic fundamentalist-backed junta on Tuesday said that the country was ready for the poll, which will take place over 20 days from Friday, despite ongoing warfare in the south.

An official in Sudan's General Elections Commission (GEC) told AFP that the commission finished distribution of voting cards all over the country's states, "including those in south Sudan."

The draft constitution passed by the parliament installed since General Omar Al Bashir took power in a military coup in June 1989 is controversial because of its ambiguities over political and religious freedoms.

In Cairo, a spokesman for the Umma Party, the main northern opposition group that was scrapped along with all other political bodies after the coup, urged a boycott on the grounds that "the referendum is without interest."

"We reject it because the proposed constitution represents the position of the National Islamic Front (NIF) and gives no freedom of expression to other political parties," Umma spokesman Salah Galal told AFP.

The NIF is led by Hassan Turabi, seen as the eminence grise behind the junta, though his movement was officially banned with all others, including the moderate Muslim Umma of ousted Premier Sadek Al Mahdi.

The mainstream southern rebels, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of Colonel John Garang, for their part slammed the draft text, which makes no mention of a multiparty system.

Daniel Kodi, head of the SPLA office in Cairo, said his movement "has totally rejected this constitution, which does not represent the point of view of the Sudanese people and does not allow them to decide their future."

GEC Chairman Abdul Monim Al Zain Al Nahas has told AFP that people in areas held by the SPLA could vote in nearby government-held areas where they reside or to which they could go.

The mainly Christian and animist south of Africa's largest country has been gripped by civil war for more than 15 years, as rebels seek to end Islamic domination.

The ballot papers will be in two colours, green for "yes" and red for "no," according to electoral staff, who put the number of registered voters at about 10 million, to use 810 polling stations.

An unspecified number of Sudanese abroad are currently being registered at embassies and can vote from May 10. No official figures are available, but some three million Sudanese are estimated to live mainly in Egypt, Lihya and Saudi Arabia.

With results due at the end of May, President Bashir plans to sign the constitution on June 30, the ninth anniversary of his coup. The previous constitution of 1985 was suspended then.

The Al Usbu newspaper on Wednesday said that, in a poll, 48 per cent of those it asked would back the text, 29 per cent were opposed and 23 per cent abstained.

The new text uses a rare Arabic word, tewali, for provisions on free political, cultural and professional affiliation, raising a heated controversy because the term avoids specifying whether free political parties will be allowed.

Hamas priority is to fight Israel — Yassin

CAIRO (AFP) — The Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, will step up attacks against Israel over the deadlock in the peace process, the group's spiritual guide Sheikh Ahmad Yassin warned in remarks published Wednesday.

"Hamas' priority is to step up resistance and strengthen the strikes against the occupation enemy," Sheikh Yassin told the Arabic-language daily Al Hayat upon his arrival Tuesday in Iran.

Sheikh Yassin was asked what Hamas would do to counter the freeze in the peace process.

The cleric also ruled out progress from next week's meetings in London between U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

"We cannot expect anything from it because the United States is not interested in putting pressure on Israel. There is nothing new under the sun," Sheikh Yassin said.

He said he expected a "total freeze."

Sheikh Yassin also pressed Arafat's Palestinian National Authority to "start up a constructive dialogue [with Hamas] in order to close Palestinian ranks in the face of Israeli intransigence."

"We should not pin any hope on America or the Oslo accords for the creation of a Palestinian state and the liberation of Palestinian territory.

"The authority should think seriously about returning to the trenches to resist occupation," he said.

Hamas, which is opposed to the peace process, has carried out a number of deadly suicide bombings in recent years which have left scores of Israelis dead.

Israel mourns its dead before celebrating jubilee

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israelis mourned on Wednesday the 20,332 men and women who died fighting to create and defend the Jewish state. But the day was to end on a more festive note with celebrations of Israel's 50th jubilee anniversary.

"Thanks to the heroism of the fallen, we can look to the future with hope. 50 years after the creation of the state of Israel and 3,000 years after the creation of the kingdom of Israel," Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu said at the main state memorial day service at Jerusalem's Mount Herzl cemetery.

At 11:00 a.m., Israel stood still as sirens wailed across the nation, signalling a two-minute moment of silence in memory of the killed soldiers.

At Mount Herzl, Mr. Netanyahu and President Ezer Weizman laid wreaths in memory of the dead from Israel's wars with the Arabs, while thousands of people flocked to the other 40 military cemeteries in the country under sunny skies.

"Israel's soldiers allowed us to transform a decimated people into a nation capable of defending itself and controlling its destiny," Mr. Netanyahu said.

"It is this nation, of Jews, Druze, bedouins and Circassians mixed together which will enable us to aspire to peace," he said.

Despite the words of hope, Israel's 50th memorial day took place under the shadow of rising tensions with Israel's U.S. ally and Arab neighbours due to the long deadlock in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

In such a gloomy diplomatic atmosphere, Israel's memorial day ceremonies took on an even heavier tone this year.

Mr. Netanyahu began his day with a private ceremony at the Jerusalem grave of his brother, Yonatan, an army commando officer killed during the rescue of Israeli hostages in an airline hijacking to Entebbe, Uganda, in 1977.

Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Weizman then presided over the first annual state ceremony in memory of Israel's some 1,500 "victims of terrorism." The two leaders dedicated a monument to the slain civilians at Mount Herzl.

One of Wednesday's ceremonies was marred by a scuffle between mourning families and Deputy Housing Minister Meir Porush, who was representing the government.

Relatives of fallen soldiers angrily objected to the presence of Porush, who leads an ultra-Orthodox Jewish party, most of whose constituents refuse to serve in the army.

Wednesday night at sundown, however, the nation would turn its attention to a host of celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Israel's creation according to the Hebrew calendar.

Brotherhood criticises Arab anti-terrorism pact

CAIRO (AP) — The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest fundamentalist group, on Wednesday criticised a new Arab League anti-terrorism pact, saying it failed to condemn "state terrorism."

Interior and justice ministers of the 22-member league signed the pact last week in Cairo. The first Arab anti-terror agreement pledges that states will not allow their lands to be used for the plotting or executing acts of political violence.

Maamoun Hodeibi, the Brotherhood's spokesman, said the pact also should have dealt with "terrorist governments." He did not say to which government he referred, but at least one statement he made appeared to allude to Algeria.

"There are some terrorist governments. We hear, for example, that in a country 1,500 people were killed," he said. "Individual and group terrorism is rejected, and state terrorism should be forbidden. Human rights must be respected."

Last week's agreement outlines cooperation in the investigation and arrest of suspected extremists and establishes guidelines for their extradition.

The pact exempts resistance movements, a move meant to except attacks on Israel from its definition of terrorism.

Mr. Hodeihi also brought up the Arab League document's failure to deal with the reasons behind terrorism, echoing many Arab opposition groups who claim that the main cause of terrorism is government oppression.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION
Tel. 773111-19
PROGRAMME TWO

Thursday Programmes
15:10 .. Cartoon — The Adventures of Moby Dick
16:10 .....L'Ecole des Fans
17:00 .....Heidi (Ep. 4)
18:00 Drama — The Burned Bridge
19:00 .....Le Journal
19:15 Science Magazine — Atomes Crochus
19:30 .....News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — Big Brother Jake
20:00 ..... Favourite Films
20:30 Special Programe on the 30th anniversary of Jordan Television
21:10 The Oprah Winfrey Show
22:00 .....News in English
22:30 Feature film — "Thicker Than Blood"
23:59 .....Varieties
01:00 .....End of T.X.

Friday Programmes
14:10 Cartoon — The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin
14:30 .....Wishbone
15:00 .....French Programmes
17:00 .....He Shoots, He Scores
18:10 .....Tarazan
19:00 ..... Le Journal
19:15 "Les Cle's de Fart Boyard"
19:30 .....News Headlines
19:35 .....Comedy — "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air"
20:00 Documentary — Life on the Internet
20:30 .....Equinox
21:10 .....Drama: "Bablyon-5"
22:00 .....News in English
22:30 ....Mini-series: "Alcatraz" (pt. 3)
23:59 .....End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:22 .....Fajr
05:47.....(Sunrise) Duha
12:33.....Dhuhr
16:12.....'Asr
19:19.....Maghreb
20:44.....'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811.
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifieh Tel. 5920146
The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Fine weather conditions will prevail during the day becoming slightly cool at night. Temperatures will be around average with winds light and variable occasionally becoming easterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be warm, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman 10/25
Aqaba 18/33
Deserts.....07/27
Jordan Valley 15/31

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 24, Aqaba 32
Humidity readings: Amman 26 per cent, Aqaba 28 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Abbas Al Hakim 885446
Dr. Arafat Al Ashhab ..5602507
Dr. Ayman Al Muhtaseb 875748
Dr. Jamal Jbarah 847351
Firas pharmacy 5661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Asema pharmacy....4637055
Nairoukh pharmacy ...4623672
Al Salam pharmacy ...4636730
Yacoub pharmacy 4644945
Shmeisani pharmacy ..4637660
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Mazen Abu Bakir ...276852
Al Quds pharmacy .....
ZARQA:
Dr. Ya'coub Al Khatib 991772
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre.....4637111
Civil Defence Department ..5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency.....199
Rescue Police 192. 4621111. 4637777
Fire Brigade.....4617101
Blood Bank.....775121
Highway Police.....843402
Traffic Police.....896390
Public Security Dept.....4630321
Hotel Complaints.....5605800
Price Complaints.....5661176
Water & Sewerage Complains 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) .....12)
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs.....5661101
Jordan Television ..... .773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority ...815615
Electric Power Co.... 4636381
RJ Flight Information..44-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport ..44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199
The Islamic, Abdli 5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 836813. 856856
Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity.....4644281/6
Akileh Maternity.....4642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman. 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani ...5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5669131
University Hospital 5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir.....775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 5602240/50
Amal Hospital 5674155
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital .....(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital .....(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital..... (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital .....(09)990990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital .....(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital .....(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital .....(02)247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER
QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200 where it should always be verified.
Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
09:15 ..... Sanaa (RJ)
10:05 ..... Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
10:05 .....New Delhi (RJ)
10:15 .....Bombay (RJ)
10:25 ..... Beirut (RJ)
10:40 .....Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:50 .....Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
11:25 .....Colombo (RJ)
15:35 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:30 .....London (RJ)
18:45 .....Kuwait (RJ)
19:10 .....Athens (RJ)
19:55 .... Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)
20:15 Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
20:30 .....Moscow (RJ)
23:55 .....Larnaca (RJ)

Other Flights
13:00 .....Riyadh (SV)
14:10 Muscat, Abu Dhabi (GF)
15:10 .....Shariqah (AH)
15:40 .....Doha (QR)
16:00 .....Dubai (EK)
19:00 .....Paris (AF)
20:25 .....Tel Aviv (LY)
21:10 .....London (BA)
21:10 .....Beirut (ME)
21:40 .....Cairo (MS)
23:20 ..... Istanbul (TK)
23:35 .....Larnaca (CY)
01:15 ..Amsterdam, Beirut (KL)
03:00 .....Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW)
(For Thursday and Friday)
10:20 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA and proceeding to Marka Airport) (RW)
20:20 .....Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA on Friday only, (RW)
22:35 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA on Thursday only) (RW)
23:25 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:45 .....Beirut (RJ)
11:00 .....Moscow (RJ)
11:50 ....Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
12:00 .....Aqaba, Paris (RJ)
12:15 ....Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:20 Amsterdam, Chicago (RJ)
12:45 .....Kuwait (RJ)
13:20 .....London (RJ)
13:20 .....Athens (RJ)
20:35 .....Larnaca (RJ)
21:10 .....Cairo (RJ)
21:20 .....Jeddah (RJ)
00:30 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)
03:00 .....Jeddah (add) (RJ)
07:00 ..... Paris (add) (RJ)

Other Flights
06:15 .....Istanbul (TK)
07:00 .....Frankfurt (LH)
08:20 ..... London (BA)
08:45 ..... Beirut (ME)
14:30 .....Riyadh (SV)
15:00 .....Abu Dhabi (GF)
16:00 ...Annabah, Algiers (AH)
16:30 .....Doha (QR)
17:00 ....Damascus, Dubai (EK)
21:10 ..... Tel Aviv (LY)
22:40 ..... Cairo (MS)
02:15 .....Amsterdam (KL)
04:00 .....Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings
(For Thursday and Friday)
08:00 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:45 Tel Aviv (from QAIA — on Thursday only) (RW)
21:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

'Heritage centre' to be moved from development area

By Ramadan Rawashdeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Following a decision by Amman Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi, a 70-year-old "heritage centre" owned and operated by the Circassian community in Ras Al 'Ain, one of the oldest districts of Amman, is to be moved and re-erected not far from its present location.

The centre, built in the old traditional style and inaugurated by the late King Abdullah, founder of the Kingdom, is located within an area that is being developed by the Greater Amman Municipality.

The centre comprises a public library and a multipurpose hall that has been used as a meeting place for politicians, writers and senior public figures since its establishment.

Dr. Abbadi has given instructions that the heritage centre be pulled down stone by stone and re-built in the same style and form 30 metres away from its original location, not far from the new city hall and other modern municipality buildings, including the mayor and the municipality's offices, a cultural centre, a mosque and other public facilities.

The municipality's complex at the site is being built on 140 dunums of land, and the Circassian centre had to be moved to make room for the completion of these plans.

The Amman municipality has long adopted a plan and allocated funds to purchase traditional and old homes in Amman built in the traditional Islamic style and restore them as part of the country's cultural heritage. Buildings covered under this plan include the birthplace of His Majesty King Hussein and the old Zahraa School, not far from the former municipality building.

The municipality is at present building a plaza of fountains at the site while going ahead with plans to complete the new complex.

HRH Princess Basma at the Cultural Forum conference on Wednesday (Petra photo)

Princess Basma commends schools' efforts in raising education standard

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Princess Basma on Wednesday delivered an address to the seventh conference of the Private Schools' Cultural Forum commending the efforts of public and private schools to raise the standard of education for the new generation.

Such meetings in which the participants exchange ideas and experiences are needed to enhance the educational process in the Kingdom, said the Princess, who praised the level of cooperation between private and public schools.

Hisham Khatib, member of the board of trustees of the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF), opened the meeting by pointing out that the education offered by private schools has improved dramatically and contributed to raising the standard of students' education.

Dr. Khatib told the participants, who represent 26 private schools which are members of the forum, that the programmes of private schools have contributed to the introduction of modern technology and developed the methodology of education.

Several personalities and institutions that have contributed to the forum's activities were presented with honorary shields.

The two-day meeting will review a number of working papers dealing with various aspects of the educational process.

The forum is designed to help promote the educational system in Jordan, bolster relations between private schools, improve the proficiency of teaching staffs and enable private schools to exchange ideas and experiences in academic, sports, technical, social and other fields.

Federation of Labour Unions elects new chairperson

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Central Council of the Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions (FJLU) has elected Mazen Ma'aita as the federation's new chairperson and Fathallah Omrani as deputy chairperson.

The elections were held with the participation of 102 council members representing the 17 Jordanian unions. Each union is represented in the council by six members elected at the meeting.

Messrs. Ma'aita and Omrani were elected unopposed after the incumbent chairperson and deputy chairperson, Khaled Shreim and Khalil Hiyasat respectively, withdrew from the race.

Eleven members of the council, which has a mandate ending in the year 2002, are affiliated with political parties.

Addressing a meeting after the election, the newly elected chairperson pledged to work diligently with the council members to reduce unemployment, amend the present Social Security Corporation Law to favour workers, and ensure a comprehensive health insurance scheme covering all workers in Jordan.

Noting that the economic and political developments in the Middle East are affecting workers, Mr. Ma'aita said he is determined to help introduce amendments to current laws to set a minimum wage for workers, strengthen relations with federations in the Arab World and organise training courses for workers.

For his part, Mr. Omrani said the council will study the various union proposals submitted and focus attention on the question of poverty and attracting investments to create jobs.

The 11 politically affiliated council members identify with the Islamic Action Front, the National Constitutional Party, the Jordan Communist Party and the Progressive Unionist Party.

Badia programme researching projects for area's development

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

SAFAWI — The Jordan Badia Research and Development Programme (JBRDP) is working on several projects in the areas of water, tourism, human resources, minerals and livestock as part of efforts to develop the arid region that covers over 80 per cent of the Kingdom's total area.

Mohammad Aoun, a JBRDP technical engineer, said the joint Jordanian-British project's 1997-2000 plan of action is focusing on research to help develop the badia without hurting its ecosystem and inhabitants, who form one-fifth of Jordan's 4.5 million population.

The JBRDP, set up in 1992 under the patronage of HRH Crown Prince Hassan and the Duke of Kent, operates under the aegis of Jordan's Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST) and Britain's Royal Geographic Society (RGS).

Mohammed Shahbaz, head of the JBRDP, said Britain's Department for International Development (DID) granted JD500,000 to the programme to cover comprehensive studies related to the region's half-million livestock population.

"We hope that one day the programme will evolve to become a national centre for studies on dry and arid land," he told the Jordan Times.

The project has also documented historical sites in the eastern badia, including Qasr Burq'a, a Roman-Byzantine structure on a lake, as part of efforts to develop the area's tourism potential.

The site, constructed of basalt, lies 175 kilometres northeast of the oasis town of Azraq, once a main source of water supplies for Amman.

"The most important thing is to strike a careful balance between local people, the environment and tourism," Sharifa Zein, JBRDP financing manager, told the Jordan Times during a familiarisation tour last weekend.

"We need to attract Jordanians, especially young people, to enrich their knowledge of their own country and its sites."

The project is also trying to improve health services in the eastern badia — covering 35 communities of nearly 18,000 people — as it lacks hospitals and specialised doctors.

Researchers are also looking into ways to boost the area's agricultural potential by improving farming and irrigation techniques to reduce water wastage, estimated at 4.1 million cubic metres (mcm) a year.

In parallel, the project is launching a public awareness campaign to cut down on unnecessary water consumption.

In the field of education, the project is trying to point out areas of weakness to help inhabitants cope with challenges posed by a changing world.

JBRDP statistics show that the badia provides 24.36 per cent of Jordan's national income; 60 per cent of fossil water resources, JD585 million revenue from mineral wealth, 90 per cent of total grazing lands, 10 per cent of traditional energy production, and 70 per cent of total red meat production.

The programme, based in Safawi, 156 kilometres northeast of Amman, covers over 11,000 kilometres in area stretching between the borders of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria.

The programme is financed by the HCST, the Badia Friends Fund, and Badia's Credit Fund.

Planned rally marking Israel's 50th anniversary of occupation banned

By Francesca Ciriaci
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government on Wednesday banned a rally planned by the Islamist-led coalition of opposition parties to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Israel's 1948 occupation of Palestine.

Officials told the Jordan Times that the ban was issued in compliance with the 1992 Political Parties Law, which stipulates that the activities of political parties must be restricted to party premises.

The rally, planned for Thursday, was to start from the headquarters of the Union of the Professional Associations.

Opposition leaders responded by urging citizens and politicians to boycott an Israeli embassy reception to be held on Thursday to celebrate Israel's 50th independence day.

The opposition has called for a boycott of Israeli national day celebrations every year since Jordan and Israel signed the 1994 peace treaty and exchanged diplomatic missions.

The rally, organised by the 13 opposition parties represented in the Higher Committee for Coordination Among the Opposition Parties (HCCAOP), was meant to coincide with this year's Israeli embassy function.

"The government says that [it banned the rally] because we submitted the request in the name of the Higher Committee," a body that is not recognised by the government.

"But I am sure that, even if we sent [the request] in some other way, the answer would have still been no," said Deputy Mohammad Ouran (Tulkarm), who is currently holding the six-month chair of the HCCAOP.

Opposition leaders told a press conference at the headquarters of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) that the Amman governor on Tuesday refused to authorise the rally. They added that 11th-hour negotiations on Tuesday and Wednesday with officials at the Ministry of Interior also failed.

Meanwhile, the Israeli embassy here confirmed that preparations were proceeding for Thursday's reception.

"The number of regrets that we have received is not unusual for any diplomatic function by any other embassy," said the Israeli embassy spokesperson, Ro'ey Gilad.

The Israeli embassy declined to specify the number of invitations sent or the number of regrets received so far.

"After 50 years of struggle, having the Israeli embassy celebrate the occupation of Palestine here, in Amman, while our public meetings are banned, is simply unbelievable," said Dr. Ouran, who is also the secretary general of the left-wing Arab Land Party.

The HCCAOP accused the government of going out of its way "to please the Israelis, at the expense of its own people."

"The government is allowing aggressors and occupiers to celebrate on our soil," said IAF Deputy Secretary General Hammam Sa'id, a hardline Islamist.

Mr. Sa'id referred to the establishment of the Jewish state as "the worst memory in our life," and asked the government to shut down the Israeli embassy.

"Struggling for the Holy Land is the 'abc' of our language, and it is a sacred duty for all Arabs to oppose the occupation of Palestine," Dr. Ouran told reporters.

Notwithstanding the government's ban, the HCCAOP announced a series of initiatives, including debates, seminars, and book exhibitions, to be held over the next few weeks in different parts of the Kingdom.

Half of Jordanians are of Palestinian origins. Though most of them have been fully integrated into Jordan's economy and society, some 350,000 Palestinians forced to flee their homes in the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli conflicts are still living in camps.

Disaster management centre, UNDP sign training agreement

By Ahmad Khatib
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Hashemite Charity Organisation (HCO) and the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) Wednesday signed an agreement to improve Jordan's ability to handle natural and man-made disasters.

The accord will help the HCO Disaster Management Training Centre (DMTC) cope with both situations through a strategy based on planning, response, and the timely dissemination of disaster-related information.

UNDP Resident Representative Jorgen Lissner signed the deal with Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi, who is also HCO secretary general. The organisation was set up by HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, who also chairs its board of directors.

Jordan will make a $211,000 in-kind donation, while the UNDP will grant $197,000 to the one-year project, which will help train civil servants and staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in disaster management.

Iyad Abu Mughli, UNDP senior environmental officer, said the agency was planning to hold a regional workshop in Jordan on disaster management within the next two months.

"Participants from Arab and Islamic countries will attend," he told the Jordan Times.

Prince Hassan established the DMTC in 1995, the only such facility in the region, with the hope of expanding its services to Arab and Islamic countries in the region.

The HCO is a non-governmental organisation set up 1990 after hundreds of thousands of Jordanians fled Kuwait because of the Gulf crisis.

Jordan is susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, flash floods and occasional severe snowfall and to man-made catastrophes such as traffic and industrial accidents, influxes of refugees and displaced people from neighbouring countries.

Attorney plans appeal after court upholds man's death sentence

By Rana Husseini
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The defence attorney of a 52-year-old man sentenced to death for the 1989 murder of his wife Wednesday said he is planning to appeal the decision at a higher court.

Attorney Taha Ali Rawashdeh said he was not convinced with the court's decision to sentence his client, Ahmad Ali, to death, adding that he felt his client should have benefited from a reduction in penalty.

"My client killed his wife to cleanse his honour, a fact the Criminal Court did not take into consideration," Mr. Rawashdeh told the Jordan Times.

Mr. Ali's death sentence was upheld by the Criminal Court, headed by Judge Jihad Khasawneh and including Judges Ahmad Khatib and Yassin Abdullat, following a higher court's request to reconsider the original sentence.

In its original ruling on Dec. 8, 1997, the Criminal Court sentenced Mr. Ali to death for the premeditated murder of his wife, Amneh Hassan, 40, a mother of nine.

The defendant claimed in court that he killed and buried his wife in a cave in the Tabekt Fahel area in the northern part of the Kingdom for reasons of honour, stating that "he saw a man leaving his house late at night."

However, the Criminal Court then rejected his pleas of cleansing his honour and sentenced him to death.

The Court of Cassation returned the case to the Criminal Court to "reconsider the defendant's accusations and determine if he should benefit from a reduction in penalty."

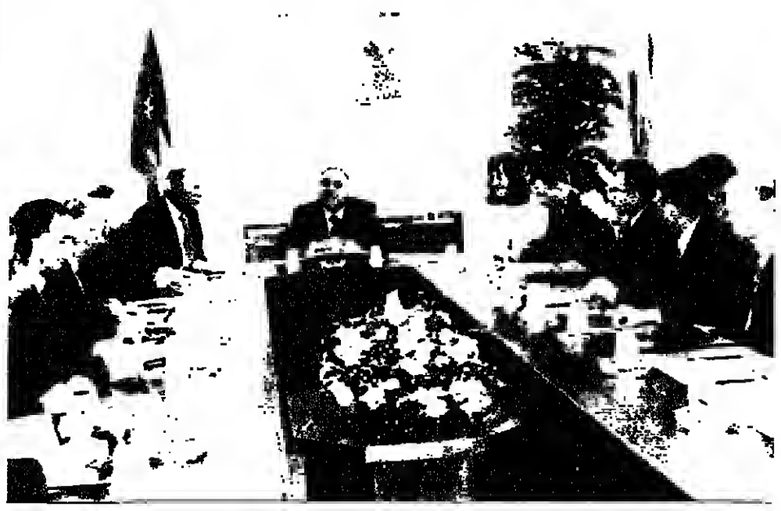
According to court documents, the defendant told police that he decided to kill his wife after seeing a man leave his house late at night in 1989 upon returning home from a party.

The court added that "although his wife denied having an affair, he did not believe her and plotted to kill her."

On the evening of the incident, it maintained, the defendant lured his wife to a deserted cave, shot her twice in the back and buried her in the cave.

The following morning, he asked his children about his wife's whereabouts, then went and placed a missing person ad in the newspaper.

Two months later, the defendant married another women, the court said.



Minister of Transport and Telecommunications Sami Gammoh on Wednesday briefs the U.S. delegation on regional developments (Petra photo)

Visiting U.S. defence college delegation briefed on regional developments

AMMAN (Petra) — A delegation from the U.S. National Defence College Wednesday met with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marshal Abdul Hafez Mirai Kaabneh and discussed the general political situation in the Middle East, U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation and issues of common concern to the two countries.

The delegation, led by retired Admiral Wesley MacDonald, was briefed on the development and the duties of the Jordan Armed Forces and their role within the U.N. peace-keeping forces around the world.

Also Wednesday, the delegation met with acting Foreign Minister Sami Gammoh, who outlined Jordan's foreign policies and the Kingdom's principled stand vis-à-vis the peace process.

Voicing Jordan's hope that the U.S. will play a more active role in establishing peace and security in the Middle East, Mr. Gammoh said security and economic prosperity for all peoples depend on the establishment of a just peace.

The minister also discussed the Middle East situation with the delegation members.

Prize-winning machine expected to improve students' technical skills

By Mohammad Ben Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A government high school has won HRH Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, 1998 "Scientific Prize" for developing an electrical machine that allows students to do experiments and is almost five times cheaper than similar imported equipment.

The Prince Abdullah bin El Hussein Professional Assembling School, in the governorate of Ajloun, north of Amman, received the prize last week at a special ceremony held under the patronage of Prince Hassan.

Teachers Wednesday said the electricity-circuit machine will help improve the technical and vocational skills of students focusing on electrical studies through its multi-purpose applications, including how to lay electricity lines at homes and inside car engines.

"The project has two main objectives: a practical one and an economic one," a teacher, who requested anonymity, told the Jordan Times.

"It will help students develop their basic skills to be able to cope with the needs of the local market while allowing the teacher to directly supervise the trainees to boost their creativity and self-reliance."

The machine was assembled by schoolteacher Bassem Hleil Badr at a cost of JD847 — well below the JD4,000 cost on international markets.

"In addition, it does not require much maintenance and cuts the timing of each exercise to one hour instead of the three hours it takes on the traditional machine," said the teacher.

This machine could be used by community colleges and professional schools across the Kingdom, he added.

"The school wanted to launch an initiative to upgrade the country's educational standard while trying to bridge the gap with the world's modern technology at the cheapest possible rates," he said. "Thankfully, we succeeded in our mission."

what's going on

SCANDINAVIAN FILM WEEK

* Finnish film "Dog Thieves," Icelandic film "Benjamin Dove," and Swedish film "The Brothers Lionheart" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 11:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. respectively.
* Norwegian film "Carl and the Angels," Swedish film "Nature's Warrior," and Norwegian film "Whitbear King Valemon" at the Royal Cultural Centre on Friday at 11:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. respectively.

FILMS

* Classical film "El Verdugo" at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.
* "The Lost World" at the American Center, Abdoun on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.
* "Portrait of an Artist" (in Arabic) about artist Francis Bacon (with commentary in Arabic by Dr. Mazen Asfour) at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday at 6:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Works by Ecuadorian artist Olmedo Quimbita at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman, until May 12.
* Paintings by Naji Al Sanjori at Hammurabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until May 3.
* Works by Yassin Al Mohammadawi at the Orient Gallery, Shmeisani (Tel. 5681303/4), until May 7.
* Photographic exhibition entitled "A Tour in the Dead Sea" by Jaussen and Savignac at the French Cultural Centre, until April 30.
* Paintings by Lebanese-American artist Etel Adnan entitled "Artist's Book of Art and Poetry" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until May 21. Also displaying works by Berlin-based Syrian artist Marwan Bashi entitled "A Suite of Heads," and works by contemporary Arab artists.

Russia's new reformist cabinet could become dependent on regions

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russia woke up to a new government Wednesday with market reformers occupying key posts in Sergei Kiriyenko's cabinet, but analysts warned he could become dependent on powerful regional leaders to push reforms through.

President Boris Yeltsin retained Boris Nemtsov in the new cabinet announced Tuesday, making the high-profile reformer one of three deputy prime ministers and, according to government sources, acting premier in Mr. Kiriyenko's absence.

Further underscoring the incoming administration's commitment to reform, Viktor Khristenko was named alongside Mr. Nemtsov as deputy prime minister, while Mr. Kiriyenko kept on technocrat Mikhail Zadornov as finance minister. A third deputy premier has still to be announced.

However, the announcement that a troika of reformers would occupy key economic posts met with a muted response from the financial markets. Dmitry Konov, broker at MFK-Renaissance, said: "The market is a little higher, but is not especially optimistic."

Pundits say the government's room for manoeuvre over the economy is tight, hemmed in by poor tax collection, burgeoning wage arrears, spiralling debt and a strained budget.

Political analysts also questioned whether the new cabinet would have the clout to force controversial market reforms through a hostile state Duma lower house of parliament, cowed into accepting Mr. Kiriyenko as premier by the threat of dissolution.

In a counterpoint to the youthful technocrats holding economic posts, Mr. Yeltsin confirmed the veteran Yevgeny Primakov, 68, as foreign minister and Igor Sergeyev, 60, as defence minister, with Mr. Yeltsin loyalist Sergei Stepashin, 46, given interior.

Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the Moscow-based Centre for Strategic Studies, said as deputy prime minister Mr. Khristenko would handle regional policy as he had done while Mr. Zadornov's deputy at finance.

The appointment highlighted the new-found importance of regional elites and signalled Mr. Kiriyenko's government would rely on the Federation Council, or upper chamber of parliament, whose members are drawn from Russia's 89 regions, to implement its economic reform programme.

Mr. Khristenko "will continue this job but the status of the job has been upgraded because the relationship with regions and governors in the Federation Council is very important for the government," Mr. Piontkovsky said.

"The idea of the government is to rely on support of the Federation Council rather than the Duma because the governors are the real administration," he added.

Other analysts nevertheless predicted problems ahead for Mr. Kiriyenko, saying his avowed desire to head a cabinet picked for technical competence rather than political affiliations had resulted in a politically weak government.

"For a government of professional technocrats to work efficiently, they need strong political protection. Such protection does not exist and cannot exist in the near future," said Nikolai Petrov, of the Carnegie Endowment think-tank.

Although an efficient administrator, Mr. Kiriyenko was now completely dependent on his mentor Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Petrov said.

CIS summit under way

MOSCOW (AFP) — Leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) began Wednesday a summit aimed at discussing wide-ranging structural reforms of the ex-Soviet grouping.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin began a 1hr 45mins speech to the leaders of the 12 member states, some of whom previously expressed little hope that anything concrete would be achieved by the summit.

Mr. Yeltsin however told delegates that "the peoples of the CIS are not only expecting a declaration stating that the commonwealth exists, but also and especially, actions and concrete measures," reported the agency Interfax.

He went on to urge presidents Robert Kocharian of Armenia and Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan to "sit down at their desks and sign a document putting an end to their problems."

Armenia and Azerbaijan dispute the ownership of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave which is situated in Azerbaijan but with a mainly Armenian population.

The two leaders, whose countries fought over the enclave from 1988 to 1994, met Tuesday for the first time since the Armenian presidential elections, which brought to power Mr. Kocharian, considered a hero of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian-backed war to secede from Azerbaijan.

Further bilateral meetings among CIS members got under way on the eve of the summit and were due to continue Wednesday.

Analysts predict the summit, twice postponed due to Mr. Yeltsin's ill health, is likely to be less animated than the acrimonious conference in Moldova last October at which Russia was pilloried, despite the planned signature of more than 800 accords.

Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov said on arrival in Moscow that he did "not attach any special expectations to the coming meeting," although bilateral meetings might prove fruitful.

The grouping comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan

Russian President Boris Yeltsin (left) votes as influential businessman Boris Berezovsky looks on during his appointment as Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the body which groups 12 of the 15 ex-Soviet republics. Berezovsky, 52, replaces Ivan Korotchenya and is expected in his new job to spearhead efforts to reform the CIS, a loose body dismissed by many as just a talking shop (Renters photo)

U.K. tells ex-POWs it will not ask Japan for more cash

LONDON (R) — Britain Wednesday rejected appeals from survivors of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps to lobby Tokyo for more compensation, saying there was no legal basis for doing so.

Campaigners for the surviving prisoners want Britain to reopen a 1951 peace treaty with Japan under which Tokyo paid small sums of money to camp survivors.

But Junior Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett said the British government had studied the case for challenging the treaty in 1955 and decided to do nothing.

"The preliminary legal advice that is given to us as a government and (upon) which we have to act is that 40 years or more later it is impossible for us to reopen that treaty," he told BBC radio.

"The simple fact is that we have been told by the Japanese the treaty will not be reopened," said Mr. Fatchett, who met representatives of the prisoners late Tuesday.

Martyn Day, a solicitor representing the prisoners, said the 1951 treaty contained a clause saying that if Japan was more generous to camp survivors from other nations Britain had the right to seek more money.

He said foreign office documents from 1955 revealed the government knew that Burmese and Swiss survivors had been paid 50 times more than British victims.

"All along we've been told the British government had no legal right to go back to the Japanese and here are these documents saying they did have those rights," he told BBC radio.

"I think it's very depressing indeed that we've reached this stage — after 50 years of the prisoners of war bashing their heads against the Japanese — that this government has decided they're not prepared to do anything more."

Later Wednesday parliament is due to debate prisoners' demands for compensation and a meaningful apology from Japan for the abuse they suffered.

Thousands of allied prisoners were forced by the Japanese imperial army to work as slave labourers during the war and many were tortured or starved and died in captivity.

Some survivors say they plan to insult Japanese Emperor Akihito during an official visit next month by turning their backs on him as he as he approaches Buckingham Palace with Queen Elizabeth in a gilded horse-drawn coach.

Mr. Fatchett — who has raised the matter with the Japanese on several occasions since the labour government took power a year ago — said the fault lay with the conservative administration of 1955.

"We are constrained by a decision taken 43 years ago by a conservative minister. We have to live with that," he said.

"And whatever the consequences of that — and I understand some of the disappointments — we cannot pretend that decision was not taken by the then conservative government."

Disgruntled survivors say a recent decision to decorate Emperor Akihito during his visit with the order of the garter, Britain's highest award for chivalry, has made them even more bitter.

Six organisations from Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand launched a lawsuit in Tokyo three years ago, demanding an official apology and compensation of $22,000 each from the Japanese government for inhumane treatment during their captivity.

French extreme right wants anti-immigrant law

PARIS (R) — A candidate for France's far-right National Front said Wednesday she would promote a "National Preference" law discriminating against immigrants.

Cendrine Le Chevallier, the leading candidate for the seat from the Mediterranean port of Toulon, told Europe 1 Radio she wanted to stop the immigration she said was worsening unemployment.

The law would have no chance in the National Assembly, where Ms. Le Chevallier is running for the National Front's only seat, which her husband Jean-Marie won last year but then lost because he exceeded legal limits on campaign spending.

But Ms. Le Chevallier, who led the first round of voting with 39.5 per cent, may get the chance to submit the proposed bill.

Her opponent, Socialist Odette Casanova, won 22.3 per cent. The mainstream conservative parties, still reeling from the shock of National Front advances in regional elections last month, have refused to throw their support behind her to block the extreme right from winning.

Asked by Europe 1 Radio if she would submit a "National Preference" law, Ms. Le Chevallier said: "That would be one of the first things I'd do."

The National Front, which controls four town halls in southern France, advocates sending Arab and African immigrants home and amending the constitution to give preference to French citizens in jobs, housing and other state benefits.

Vitrolles, another Riviera town run by the National Front, introduced a "Baby Bonus" of 5,000 francs ($831) this year for native French and European Union couples who produced offspring.

A court declared it discriminatory and illegal and the front appealed the ruling.

The first couple to accept the bonus in January later sent the money back, saying they were ashamed to have accepted it.

Ms. Le Chevallier, whose husband is also mayor of Toulon and a European Parliament deputy, declined to tell Europe 1 whether she would give up her National Assembly seat to her spouse once his one-year period of parliamentary ineligibility is over.

Basque ETA rebels see lessons in Irish peace deal

BILBAO, Spain (R) — The Basque guerrilla group ETA said in a communiqué released Wednesday that the recent Northern Ireland peace accords could provide lessons for helping to end decades of violence in Spain's Basque country.

ETA, in a statement published in the Basque separatist newspaper Egin, expressed "complete respect" for the Irish peace agreement reached on April 10 in Belfast and said it was "ready to learn from it."

In its first public reaction to the Irish peace process, the separatist rebels said: "The most important lesson is that it produces an overall solution and that the solution it achieves responds to all the complicated aspects of the conflict."

ETA's communiqué follows an Argentine newspaper report last weekend Irish Republican Army IRA officials and ETA representatives recently held secret talks in Uruguay to discuss whether a similar peace process could be initiated in the Basque conflict.

Moderate Basque nationalists have called on ETA to follow the IRA's example and declare a truce. An IRA ceasefire that went into effect last year paved the way for negotiations that led to a peace agreement.

ETA took note of public opinion heavily in favour of Basque peace talks, but it gave no indication it was willing to give up its armed struggle unless the Spanish government meets its demands for an independent Basque state.

ETA also used its latest communiqué to claim responsibility for 15 attacks since the end of January, including the assassination of a Seville city councillor and his wife.

ETA accused Spanish authorities of "not listening to anything other than the clamour to maintain a status quo that brings war, oppression and destruction to the Basque country."

Spanish officials have steadfastly refuse to negotiate with ETA until it renounces violence.

ETA, which stands for Basque homeland and freedom, has killed more than 800 people in its 30-year struggle for independence.

Indonesia students clash with security force

MEDAN, Indonesia (R) — Tear gas filled the air Wednesday as thousands of Indonesian students, many throwing stones, clashed with security forces here in a protest against President Suharto.

They surged on to the streets and torched a police motorcycle before tear gas shells forced them back onto the campus at the University of North Sumatra where they built barricades out of chairs and desks.

The university issued a statement saying the campus was closed until May 7, but it did not appear the students were immediately aware of it.

Des Wright of Reuters television said he saw students throw two Molotov cocktails at an armoured car stationed at the university's main entrance without damaging it.

Groups of students made forays to pelt the armoured car with stones while others lit fires, which they believed would diminish the effect of tear gas, and built barricades.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, nor was there any immediate indication that the security forces intended to move on to the campus.

The security forces appear to tolerate the protests, which began in February just before Mr. Suharto, 76, was reelected to a seventh five-year term by a body he largely hand-picked, as long as they remain on campus.

There have been demonstrations in most major Indonesian centres for political and economic reform. Most have been confined to campuses and most have been peaceful, though security forces have acted when protests move on to the streets.

Wednesday, there was also trouble in Bandung in Western Java, where witnesses said two students and two policemen were hurt as students tried to move out of a university campus there.

The greatest violence has been at university of North Sumatra.

Wednesday began with some 4,000 students swirling out of the campus and putting a passing policeman to flight with stones before torching his motorcycle.

Security forces arrived quickly and fired several tear gas shells at the students, who fled back on to campus. The iron gates to the main entrance, torn off its hinges by students Monday, were then put back in place and locked. The students tore them off again.

These protesters were clearly ignoring plans by other Medan students to woo soldiers with flowers.

Students at Medan's St. Thomas Catholic University said they planned to keep their protests peaceful, unlike Monday's confrontation at the university of North Sumatra, which security forces ended with water cannon, tear gas and a campus blockade.

"We hope the military will join us in bringing down the king," said St. Thomas student Duman Wau, referring to Mr. Suharto.

Ever-louder cries for Mr. Suharto to step down and accept responsibility for Indonesia's worst economic crisis in decades have been at the forefront of demands since the protests began.

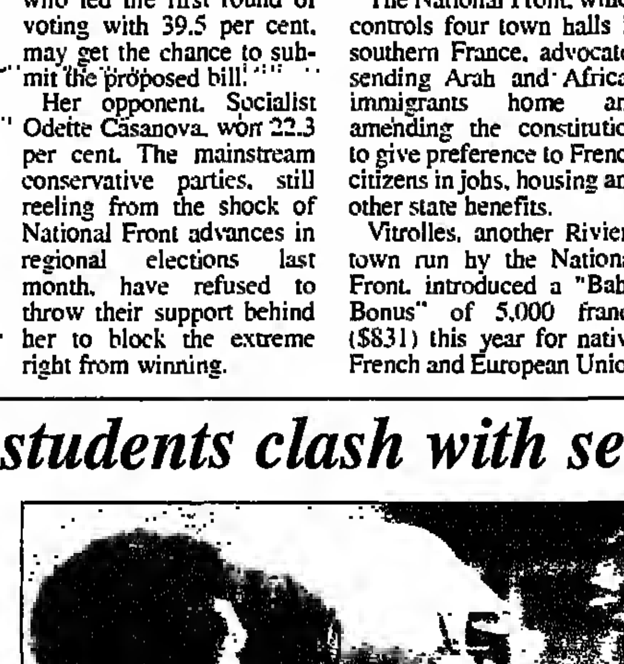
Political analysts say there are signs of backing for the protests within the powerful military and they find it significant that the older generation has not spoken out against them.

But Mr. Suharto has shown no inclination to step aside over a crisis in which the rupiah has lost some 70 per cent of its value against the dollar since July and prices of basic foodstuffs have risen rapidly.

The international monetary fund has drawn up a bail-out package for the country worth more than $40 billion in return for wide-ranging reforms.

The credit ratings agency Standard Poor's Corp said Wednesday it was concerned about pace of the key reforms of the bank sector.

It said it feared "that the restructuring of the Indonesian banking sector is not proceeding as quickly as first anticipated, and lags behind that of its regional neighbours".



Indonesian students carry a colleague after he was overcome by tear gas fired by police and troops at the University of North Sumatra in the city of Medan. About 4,000 students demanding the ouster of President Suharto clashed with security forces at the gates of the university (Reuters photo)

Gunmen kill 10 farmhands in Colombia

BOGOTA (AFP) — At least 10 farmhands were killed in cold blood by a group of gunmen who ordered them off a bus near Urrao, some 300 kilometres northwest of here, the town mayor said.

About 15 heavily-armed men picked their victims from a list they carried, made them lie face down on the ground and shot them with automatic rifles and handguns, Ivan Posada told the Radionet station late Tuesday.

He said the massacre earlier Tuesday was reported by several men who managed to escape into the heavily-forested mountainside.

One of the witnesses told the radio station the death toll could be as high as 14.

It was not immediately clear whether the gunmen belonged to the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) or to paramilitary groups, both of whom roam the rugged Antioquia department, Mr. Posada said.

One of the witness said the gunmen wore military uniforms, the mayor added.

Rising violence is a major concern for Colombian authorities in the runup to May 31 presidential election.

Tuesday, police raided a suspected FARC hideout near Bogota. Three people were arrested and a large quantity of ammunition was seized at the house in Soacha, a police spokesman said.

The defence ministry said later that security around Bogota and other major Colombian cities was being tightened to prevent guerrilla attacks as the election draws closer.

Over the weekend, the campaign headquarters in Bogota of the ruling party's presidential candidate Horacio Serpa and the opposition's Harold Bedoya were bombed.

Mr. Bedoya, a retired army general, has vowed to crush all rebel groups.

President Ernesto Samper is constitutionally banned from seeking a second term in office.

South African 'supercow' dies after bad scientific experiment

CAPE TOWN (AFP) — A cow that holds the world record for milk production has died following a scientific experiment that went wrong, the Cape Times said Wednesday.

Superstar 9405, which in November produced a world record 125 litres of milk in one day, was raised by farmer Ludwig van Deventer at Stellenbosch, 50 kilometres from here.

The envy of other dairy farmers, Superstar 9405, named after the year and month she was born, became the object of fascination of scientists around the world.

Monday last week, the supercow was fit and healthy and produced 94 litres of milk in the morning, the report said.

That afternoon, a scientist and two students from the Stellenbosch University came to take skin samples from her. An hour-and-a-half later, the cow collapsed.

Week-long efforts to keep the bovine alive failed and she died Tuesday.

"It's a bloody calamity," Mr. van Deventer said.

"We've got people all around the country trying to determine what went wrong. Everyone's ducking and diving now but the fact is they've killed a cow that was one in a million."

He said the scientists took skin samples from the cow's tail after injecting her with a local anaesthetic.

"I opened my doors to the scientists because they believed they could make a major discovery for the dairy world by studying her... I've paid a terrible price by being nice to these people."

The Scottish scientists who cloned Dolly the sheep had begun negotiations for a research bid to try to clone Superstar, he said.

Fortunately Superstar has a sister, Megacow, who produces just as much milk, but Mr. van Deventer is not letting anyone near her. "I'm closing the door to all people who want to study her," he said.

"I can't take another chance."

Tibetan self immolation questions Dalai Lama's middle-path

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Tibetans fighting against Chinese rule in their homeland said here Wednesday the death of a compatriot for the cause could steer the campaign away from the Dalai Lama's non-violent struggle.

They said Thupten Ngodub's self-immolation could put their anti-Chinese campaign more firmly in the hands of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), which differs from their God-King's "Middle-Path" of absolute non-violence.

Ngodub, 50, set himself on fire here Monday and suffered 100-per cent burns after the police broke up a marathon hunger strike by six Tibetans. He died of cardiac arrest early Wednesday in a Delhi hospital.

The self-immolation is the first such protest by a Tibetan since 1951 when China occupied Tibet.

According to the TYC, which boasts of 10,000 members here and thousands of followers in Tibet, Ngodub's extreme protest was a watershed in the history of the Tibetan's non-violent struggle.

Karma Yeshi, TYC vice president and one of the group's hardline leaders, said: "The Dalai Lama did not achieve anything during his 40 years' of struggle."

"We have achieved something with Ngodub's death. Thousands of Tibetans in our homeland have now woken up and will support our type of campaign against China."

"The Middle Path is the strategy of His Holiness and the militant struggle is ours ... maybe one day both the angles will meet," Mr. Yeshi told AFP in an interview.

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of six million Tibetans. He fled to India at the head of some 100,000 followers following an abortive anti-Chinese uprising in his homeland in 1959.

Mr. Yeshi said although Tibetans had respect for their God-king, they were in a militant mood.

"From now our campaign would be more aggressive," the TYC vice chief said.

The Tibetan Congress in a statement said: "The Tibetan people have sent a clear message to the world that they can sacrifice themselves for the cause of an independent Tibet ... More blood will flow in the coming days."

"The Tibetan people will fight to the last drop of their blood. Tibetans of this generation will create a new chapter in the modern history of Tibet."

The Dalai Lama, while visiting Ngodub in a hospital here Tuesday, said he was "confused."

"I have made every effort for the past 20 years for the self-rule of the Tibetans but I have failed ... I am confused... I have no alternative solution to offer."

"For many years, I have been able to persuade Tibetan people to eschew violence in our freedom struggle. Today, it is clear a sense of frustration and urgency is building up among many Tibetans as seen by the unto-death hunger strike and yesterday's tragic incident."

"This frustration stems from the fact that the Tibetan people... are being gradually wiped out from the face of the earth," he said.

Several leaders from the Tibetan government-in-exile, in the northern Indian town of Dharamsala, have previously questioned the non-violent path of their spiritual leader as well.

Pema Dhondup, editor of a Tibetan newspaper in India said: "The signals are very clear... Backers of our cause are now impatient...They want a free Tibet, at any cost."

Albanians wearing bibs spelling out 'KOSOVA' demonstrate outside the Italian Foreign Ministry as envoys of the six-nation Contact Group began talks to discuss measures to prod Yugoslavia and ethnic Albanians into negotiating a settlement to end tension and violence in Kosovo (Reuters photo)

Divided Contact Group begins meeting on Kosovo

ROME (AFP) — The Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia began talks here Wednesday on how to end the crisis in the Serbian province of Kosovo.

The discussions bring together senior foreign affairs officials from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States.

Italy's Deputy Foreign Minister Piero Fassino said the talks were aimed at easing tension in the Albanian majority province and "creating conditions for opening dialogue between the two sides."

More than 100 people have died since a Serbian crackdown was launched in March in Kosovo, whose two million population is 90 per cent ethnic Albanian.

The Contact Group in March demanded an end to the crackdown and urged Belgrade to accept international mediation. But Belgrade has refused such outside involvement.

The United States and Britain are taking a hard line against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, seeking to impose sanctions if he refuses to budge on Kosovo, observers say. But they are running into resistance from France and Russia.

Malaysia sends air force planes and navy ships to search for tanker

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Malaysia sent air force planes and navy ships in renewed efforts to search for the missing tanker Petro Ranger, suspected of having been hijacked for its $1.5 million cargo, a maritime official said Wednesday.

Captain Prathaban Krishnan of the Klang-based Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), west of here, said authorities will continue to scour Malaysian waters for the missing ship. "We don't stop until we find some solid evidence of the ship. There has to be an outcome," he told AFP.

Capt. Prathaban said the search and rescue operation cannot "just be called off," when asked how long the search would last. "It will be on going. But we have done what we can," he added. The owners of the missing Malaysian-flagged oil tanker have offered a $50,000 reward for news about the ship's fate.

The whereabouts of the Petro Ranger was a mystery, two days after its disappearance en route from Singapore to Vietnam first became known publicly. Pirates are suspected of having seized and diverted the tanker.

The Petro Ranger, carrying 11,000 tonnes of diesel and kerosene, left Singapore on April 16 en route for Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam and was last heard from on April 17.

The Petro Ranger's shipping agents, Petroships Pte. Ltd. in Singapore, said they believed it was hijacked by pirates while navigating the South China Sea. Capt. Prathaban said he was certain the ship has not sunk because if it has, the electronic position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) would transmit a signal.

"The sea at that time was also calm," he added.

Noel Choong, regional manager of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Regional Piracy Centre here said that if the ship has been hijacked, the pirates would have destroyed the radio beacon along with all other communications equipment.

Maritime officials said if the radio beacon, often located at the bridge is switched on, the location of Petro Ranger could be mapped out.

Petro Ranger's crew of 21 was composed of an Australian master, seven Malaysians, six Indonesians, four Bangladeshis, one Filipino, a Ghanaian and a Myanmar national.

The Petro Ranger was the third fuel tanker to disappear since Nov. 17. The first was Atlanta 15, which was hijacked in Riau Straits, Indonesia. On Jan. 11, Tioman 1 was boarded by pirates near Aur Island in East Malaysia. In both incidents an unidentified tanker came alongside to siphon off the fuel.

Piracy on the high seas in South East Asia is expected to soar both in frequency and brutality as regional economic turmoil continues, maritime officials have warned.

The IMB in January said piracy throughout the world rose slightly to 229 cases last year, with killings rising and South East Asian waters, notably those around Indonesia, remaining the most dangerous.

Clouds of dissent gather ahead of Beijing University centenary

BEIJING (AFP) — Dissident calls for the release of imprisoned former students and the reported arrest of an alumnus activist Wednesday clouded plans for Beijing University's centenary celebrations next week.

A Hong Kong-based rights group said Wang Youcai — a student leader of the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square — had disappeared after travelling to Beijing to attend the May 4 ceremonies.

It was suspected authorities detained Mr. Wang to prevent him from causing trouble during the high-profile celebrations, the Information Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said, citing other mainland dissidents.

Mr. Wang disappeared Monday, a day after travelling to Beijing from his home in eastern Hangzhou city, the group said in a faxed statement. As a Beijing University alumnus, he had received a formal invitation to attend the centenary.

A desk clerk at the Tianfu Hotel, near the university campus, told AFP Mr. Wang vacated his room Monday after one night but could not confirm whether he paid his own bill and checked himself out normally.

"I was not here at the time," the clerk said.

Eighteen other alumni of the university who are now dissidents in the United States — including Wang Dan and astrophysicist Fang Lizhi — meanwhile issued an open letter urging university leaders to press for the release of five former students now imprisoned for their views.

The five are Li Hai, Hu Shigen, Lu Zhizhao, Guo Haifeng and Li Baiguang.

"We appeal to the alumni of Beijing University returning for the celebrations to use all means to remind university authorities not to forget these five people, and to take measures to help free them from prison," a copy of the letter faxed to AFP said.

University leaders had "an obligation" to help, it said.

In addition to Wang Dan and Mr. Fang — both key figures in the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, which was led by Beijing University students — signatories included prominent dissidents Wang Juntao, Chen Yizi and Hu Ping.

After the army's brutal June 4, 1989 crackdown on the Tiananmen protests, the government placed strict controls on student and faculty life on campus to suppress political debate.

The state-controlled media have been promoting the May 4 centenary by emphasising Beijing University's role as a hotbed of Marxist discussion when the ruling Communist Party was in its infancy.

Wang Youcai was listed by authorities as the 15th most wanted student activist following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. He was sentenced to four years in prison for his role in the demonstrations but was released on good behaviour in November 1991.

In recent months, he had joined other dissidents in signing several open letters to the Chinese government, mainly calling for the release of political prisoners and an official reassessment of the events of 1989.

U.S., China upbeat over presidential summit

BEIJING (AFP) — China and the United States declared Wednesday their turbulent relations were on the mend and the upcoming visit of U.S. President Bill Clinton would add further impetus to their "strategic partnership."

"The United States and China have moved well down the road towards establishing a strategic partnership," visiting U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said after officially opening a hotline between Washington and Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said if the two governments "make concerted efforts, the visit of President Clinton will be a complete success." But the warm words between Mrs. Albright and Mr. Tang masked continued divisions between the two world powers, with China putting Taiwan at the top of its agenda and the United States listing human rights, trade and non-proliferation as areas of major concern.

"There still remain some unclear areas, and the main one of these is Taiwan," Mr. Tang said.

"This is the most important and most sensitive issue in bilateral relations," he added.

Relations between China and the United States spiralled out of control in 1995 when Washington issued a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Tung-Hui in a move seen by Beijing as aimed at promoting official independence on the island.

It took two years to put ties back on an even footing, and Chinese President Jiang Zemin's state visit to the United States in October 1997 was the first step in the two nations' "strategic partnership" for the 21st century.

Mr. Clinton's return visit in June is expected to cement ties further and will be the first visit to China by a U.S. president since that of George Bush in early 1989.

Topping Mr. Clinton's agenda will be China's imprisonment of dissidents who peacefully criticise the government, fears over nuclear and chemical proliferation and the growing U.S. deficit with China.

When asked about the lifting of sanctions imposed on China after the June 4, 1989, crackdown on students in Tiananmen Square, Mrs. Albright said there was no timetable and the process would be a long one.

She gave no comment about China's human rights record, but Mr. Tang underlined Beijing's intransigence on the issue by saying that exiled dissidents Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan were still considered criminals by Beijing.

"Wang Dan and Wei Jingsheng have violated Chinese law. They committed crimes," Mr. Tang said in response to a reporter's question.

Both were serving terms for plotting to overthrow the government and were released on medical parole on the condition they went immediately to the United States.

Mrs. Albright flew into a rainy Beijing earlier Wednesday and was scheduled to hold a working lunch with Mr. Tang to discuss issues ranging from non-proliferation to human rights, trade and the environment.

Her 48-hour visit to Beijing is aimed at clearing the way for Mr. Clinton's landmark trip to China in June.

She will also meet with Vice Premier and former Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, Premier Zhu Rongji and President Jiang Zemin before flying to Seoul early Friday.

According to U.S. officials accompanying her on the tour, Mrs. Albright will focus on nailing down a date for China's already-promised signing of the U.N.'s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

She will also press for the release of more political prisoners and sound out Beijing's political will on early entry to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) — which the Washington has said will require a sweeping changes in its trade policies, they said.

The U.S. cabinet's co-ordinator for Tibet, Greg Craig, is accompanying Mrs. Albright but only in his capacity as director for policy planning, they confirmed.

Beijing protested Washington's decision to create of the office last October, describing the move as "interference in China's internal affairs."

S. African clinic hostages released after nearly 24 hours

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — Sixteen staffers at a clinic were released Wednesday after being held hostage for nearly 24 hours by a group that blamed the facility for the death of an infant, SABC radio reported.

Enraged residents of Eldorado Park, south of Johannesburg, locked the staff of the Kliptown Clinic into a room Tuesday to protest the death of six-week-old Raygene Dixon last week.

Police persuaded the protesters to release the hostages early Wednesday.

The group claimed staff at the clinic had turned away Raygene and her mother Friday because they were preparing for the official opening of the clinic, which was to be attended by various dignitaries including President Nelson Mandela.

In the end, Mr. Mandela did not attend. Raygene had been taken to the clinic because she was having trouble breathing. She was dead by the time she arrived by ambulance at another hospital.

Eldorado Park residents demanded a public apology from the president as the clinic had been closed for his impending visit, the head of the protesters, Lola Volmink, told the Sowetan newspaper.

N. Korean leader says contacts between S. and N. Korea important

SEOUL (AFP) — North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il said in a rare public statement that South and North Koreans should exchange visits and improve relations to pave the way for reunification.

"For the great unity of the nation, all the Koreans in the North, South and abroad must visit one another, hold contacts, promote dialogue and strengthen solidarity," the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) Wednesday quoted Mr. Kim as saying.

The KCNA, monitored here, quoted a long letter by Mr. Kim dated April 18 entitled "Let us reunify the country independently and peacefully through the great unity of the entire nation."

"Promoting wide-ranging visits, contacts, dialogues and solidarity among our compatriots is an important way to achieve the great unity of the nation," Mr. Kim said. "Even though there is difference in ideologies, ideals, political views and religious beliefs within our nation, the fellow countrymen can build up mutual understanding and trust and pool their will and efforts for the common objective of the nation if they all freely travel, hold contacts and dialogues and strengthen solidarity," Mr. Kim said.

The letter was released in Pyongyang last week, on the day that a high-level meeting between South and North Korea broke down in Beijing after the North refused to come up with a specific timetable for the reunion of families separated since the division of the Korean Peninsula in 1945.

The South said it would only offer fertilisers to the North if it agrees to a specific timetable for the reunions.

North Korean experts and government officials here said the letter in general showed no change in North Korea's attitude, but it was still "somewhat meaningful."

"As a whole, there is nothing new in the letter. But it is meaningful at this time since North Korea is calling for dialogue with the South despite collapse of talks in Beijing," a government official told AFP.

"The letter mentions visits between South and North Korean. That is what we want, and it is interesting it was brought up. But the text needs to be studied further," a North Korean watcher here said.

The Beijing talks were the first official government contact in nearly four years between the two Koreas, still technically at war since the 1953-53 Korean war.

South Korea has said it would not beg or force North Korea to return to the negotiating table, but would patiently wait for Pyongyang to come forward.

In his letter, North Korea's Kim said: "Dialogue between North and South must serve national unity and reunification."

"The dialogue must not be the monopoly of a few men in authority of a particular class or section. It must be a wide-ranging, nationwide dialogue that can pool the opinions of all political parties, groups and social sections."

The new South Korean government under President Kim Dae-Jung has spelt out its new policies towards North Korea including pledges not to try to foist a "German-style absorption" on the North and to provide economic help if it officially asks for it and keeps its one-million-strong army at bay.

North Korea's Kim said his country was against South Korea's previous administration "not because they were in power but their policy on dependence on foreign forces, their policy against reunification and their treachery to the country and nation.

But, he added, if South Korea's new government "takes the patriotic stand, the stand of unity in alliance with the north, we will work with them to shape the destiny of the nation."

South and North Korea have remained technically at war since the 1950-53 Korean conflict. An armistice was signed ending the conflict but never a peace agreement.

Nigerian rights groups plead for coup plotters

LAGOS (R) — Nigerian human rights groups pleaded with the country's generals Wednesday to spare the lives of six men sentenced to death for plotting to overthrow military ruler General Sani Abacha.

Gen. Abacha's ruling military council must ratify the sentences on his former deputy, Lieutenant-General Oladipo Diya, and the other five before they can be carried out. Execution for plotting a coup is traditionally by firing squad.

"We hope the death sentences will not be carried out. It will do no good to shed more blood in this country. What we need is reconciliation and a clear political direction," said Olawale Sapohunda of the Civil Liberties Organisation in Lagos. Other groups echoed the call.

Some Western diplomats said it was likely that their countries would also make some kind of plea for the prisoners.

The six were sentenced Tuesday by a seven-man military tribunal which had been sitting in secret at the central town of Jos since Feb. 14.

Of the other 24 people tried by the panel, four were jailed for life and six given lesser sentences. The rest were set free.

The sentences once again turn the human rights spotlight on the west African country of 104 million that has been under limited international sanctions since the 1995 hanging of author Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others for murder.

Government officials in Abuja said they expected the provisional ruling council would soon meet to ratify the sentences, but said no date or time had yet been fixed.

Western countries have threatened a possible extension of sanctions, though not yet to lifeblood crude oil exports, if Nigeria does not improve its attitude to human rights and restore a semblance of democracy this year.

They demanded a fair trial for Gen. Diya — who said at his first court appearance that he had been set up.

In his ruling, tribunal chairman Major-General Victor Malu, the respected former commander of the west African ECOMOG peacekeeping force, said Gen. Diya had no defence for having taken part in meetings to plot the overthrow of Gen. Abacha.

"Any officer who was given any information or who was invited to a meeting should report to the authorities of the plot when they were approached by those he claimed initiated it," Gen. Malu said.

Gen. Diya, who like Gen. Abacha is 54, had been seen as a staunch loyalist until his arrest on Dec. 20. After Gen. Abacha seized power in 1993, Gen. Diya helped bring credibility to the government by convincing some of his Yoruba kinsmen to join in.

It was a time when pundits warned Nigeria could break up after the army's annulment of presidential elections Yoruba millionaire Moshood Abiola was poised to win.

All those sentenced to death were Yorubas from southwestern Nigeria, which has become the heartland of opposition to military rule.

Gen. Abacha is a northerner like most of the soldiers who have ruled Nigeria for all but 10 years since independence from Britain in 1960.

Gen. Abacha is widely expected to stand in presidential elections on Aug. 1 after securing the backing of all five registered parties last week to stand unopposed.

Mr. Abiola has been held among dozens of detainees since declaring himself president in 1994.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation Established 1975

جوردن تايمز يومية عربية سياسية مستقلة تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية

Chairman of the Board of Directors:
ABDUL SALAM TARAWNEH

Vice Chairman & Director General:
MOHAMMAD AMAD

Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585
Facsimile: 5696183
E-mail: jotimes@go.com.jo
Web Sites: http://accessme.com/JordanTimes/

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays. Subscription and advertising rates are available from the Jordan Times advertising department.

Proposal worth considering

THE GOVERNMENT'S proposal for a two-day weekend is worth considering, but only after a thorough examination of its pros and cons. The plan mostly affects civil servants who will not have mere joyride, but will have to put in an additional hour each day to make up for the extra day off.

For those working hard, the plan might prove to be a boost to their physical and mental health because the traditional one-day weekend. Friday, is simply not enough to shed their fatigue.

However, the million dollar question remains whether the extended weekend should fall on Thursday or Saturday.

If the government decides to go ahead with a Thursday-Friday holiday, the preference of a majority of civil servants as indicated in a recent opinion poll, then the losses will be great; especially for the economy. Jordan will be cut off from the rest of the world for four successive days, making business transactions with the world a difficult matter.

However, if the government decides on a Friday-Saturday weekend, it will commit a sin in the eyes of many people who oppose that because Saturday coincides with the Jewish Sabbath.

In addition, if the government goes with the second option, the official Thursday-Friday weekend of most private and public schools will have to be changed to accommodate the new weekend.

The Amman Chamber of Industry, in a well-researched memo released this week, gave enough reasons why the government should abandon the idea. It suggested that 36 hours divided by five working days would not be as productive as the same amount of hours divided by six working days.

"With increased working hours, productivity decreases," the chamber warned.

People may resist a two-day weekend because it means that they will have to readjust their lives, and because they think there is very little they can do to fill the two-day weekend. But ultimately they will adjust and business will adjust itself to cater for their entertainment needs during a longer weekend.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Arab Al Yawm's Taher Adwan addressed the temporary Press and Publications Law which amended the 1993 law saying that the amendments were stiffly resisted by Jordanian journalists because they had infringed on their rights and marginalised the freedom of the press. The writer said the media's opposition to the temporary law or amendments resulted in the Supreme Court repealing it because it dealt a blow to the freedom of the press. If the government is now preparing a law to deal another blow to the media in a bid to impose its hegemony on it instead of trying to close the loopholes in the previous law then the confrontation will ensue again, according to the writer. He said journalists want a wider margin of freedoms to cater to the march of democracy and respect the right of the various people in a pluralistic society. The writer warned that if the government is now planing a martial-like law the journalists will be kissing good-bye to press freedoms, to the detriment of the nation.

Al Ra'i's Ibrahim Absi tackled the situation in Algeria where increasing numbers of innocent people are being massacred. The writer said that when the Algerians were fighting for their independence from France they lost one million citizens, but that was for a good cause and the sacrifice was seen as part of the price the country had to pay for freedom. But, Absi said, the present barbaric killing of villagers, mainly women and children, is cause for sadness and horror and is not helping Algeria to enhance its independence or work towards a prosperous future. The writer said that as both the government of Algeria and the main opposition party, the Islamic Salvation Front, are both claiming that they have nothing to do with the massacres, the world stands stupefied and horrified and unable to interpret these slaughters. He said it is most shocking to see innocent victims falling at the hands of ruthless murderers and it is hoped that the two main powers in Algeria will wake up and take measures to end the atrocities which are condemned by the whole world.

View from Academia

Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

The convenience of the old world order, and the fear of the new

THE FEAR on the part of some (many?) among us of the fast-approaching new millennium is due, among a number of many other complex reasons, of course, to the discomfort we are presently experiencing as a result of the somewhat abrupt transition we find ourselves going through from an old world order with which we have been familiar and comfortable into a new one with which we are neither familiar nor comfortable.

Wait a minute, some may hasten to interrupt. Of course we are familiar with the old world order, but what do you mean by saying we are comfortable with it? Do we not all condemn its brutal bipolarity? Do we not look at the cold-war era with abhorrence? Has not the mere existence of superpowers factionalised the world acutely, created unnecessary conflicts, and directly contributed to tragedies of all sorts?

Well, for people like you and me, maybe. But for many others, no. You see, many people in our part of the world tend to simplify matters a bit too much, tend to think in peculiar ways, tend to romanticise the past, and tend to cling desperately to old hypotheses, theories, and ways. You and I tend to subject what we hear to the power of analysis, reason, common-sense, and hard evidence, and call a spade a spade: the old world order, which was essentially built on selfish factions and cliques of sorts, created conflicts rather than solved them; divided rather than united; escalated rather than compromised; made war rather than peace; inspired hatred rather than toleration; championed provocation rather than cooperation. Many regional and global crises and conflicts came to an end only when the old world order collapsed. But others do not see things in the same way we do.

I still distinctly remember, though I do not remember why, one of our teachers in high school (it was the early seventies) drawing on the blackboard a map of what he called the "balance" of power in the globe, with America in a part of it (the bigger part) and the Soviet Union in another (the smaller one). And I remember him concluding his presentation (which had nothing to do with the subject of our class) in a serious, dramatic tone: Thank God we have two superpowers; the presence of the Soviet Union prevents America from swallowing the world.

I knew little about politics then to realise the full implications of what was said, and the intentions behind it, innocent or politically-motivated. But since that day, I have heard my teacher's theory repeated hundreds of times, both by individuals who knew what they were saying and parrots who were repeating after others. I heard it so much, in fact, (even in informal, daily conversations) that I became bored to death with it and with those who repeated it (especially since I made up my mind a long time ago that such a diagnosis of the world may not be apt or accurate at all). Boring or not, apt or not, accurate or not, and false or not, such hypothesis (theory, diagnosis, reading, misreading, etc.) is still repeated by many, even today. Many find it either useful or attractive.

(When I was a graduate student in the U.S. in the early 80s, during the Reagan era, most of my American acquaintances were repeating the same thing, but in reverse: If America were not there the Soviet Union would swallow the world.

Putting the validity of such reasoning aside, as well as the motives and intentions behind it, the fact remains that many in our part of the world not only find it difficult to put the old world order behind them, but they in fact yearn for it and covet it and cannot think of the new world map except in terms which mirror those of the old world. For such people the old world order was comfortable and even cosy because they felt secure in it. Not only could they explain it easily and this is where the feeling of security partly comes from but they found solace, comfort, convenience and salvation in it. The world was divided essentially into two camps (the third — the Non-Aligned Movement was basically symbolic); all you had to do was to join one or the other. It was as simple as that.

This was comfortable and secure. But it was also convenient. How? Well, your acceptance in one camp or another was relatively easy. You did not have to have an excellent human rights record, you did not have to have economic power, you did not have to be outstanding. All you needed was allegiance, and you were rewarded. You felt protected, sheltered, taken care of, provided for.

The new global order (whose precise shape and structure we have not yet precisely ascertained, but whose overall features seem to be predictable enough) is a different story entirely. It is a world in which you have to rely on yourself (you can afford to be neither a follower nor a parasite). You need sustainable development, an excellent human rights record, true democracy, ample economic strength, a reliable educational system, a healthy environment, respect of pluralism, a marriage between the indigenous culture and the various global trends effecting it, quality services, etc. You need to generate income. You need to compete. You need to put your qualifications to good use. You need to sell yourself.

The situation is much like the transition from childhood to adulthood. You no longer hope to rely on your parents or relatives for sustenance and financial support. You are on your own.

Also important is that you have to be able to deal not with one or two parties in this world, but with almost everyone. For this, countries (like individuals) need to develop charm, tack, power of persuasion, diplomacy in order to make it. They need to be competitive and excelling. You cannot rely on charity any more.

What happens at the global level is not much different from what happens at our various institutions today. The philosophy on which the old order (which is old fashioned, outdated, vicious, etc.) is based is similar to that on which factions on which cliques at our institutions (also old fashioned, outdated, vicious, etc.) are based. The ambitious and the mediocre (and many of the ambitious are usually mediocre in our part of the world) find protection, power and the ability to achieve their own aspirations through the cliques and factions they join. The problem with most institutions in our society like the problem with the old world order is the widespread bipolar (at times unipolar) factions and cliques.

I happen to think that the new global order (which though more challenging than the old is by means worse than it) is going to be neither bipolar nor unipolar. Rather it is multipolar, and much more just and benign than the old one.

Thus while to some of us the new world may be a source of discomfort and even fear to many of us, it is not. We in Jordan have reason not only to be hopeful but also quite optimistic. Jordan has never thrived on allying itself with factions or cliques throughout the days of the old world order, even in the worst of times. It has largely succeeded in steering away from cliquishness and factionalisation. It has done itself not to align itself totally with one camp or the other.

At the international level it has throughout most of the century attempted to build relations with all, and to avoid blind alliance with or allegiance to this or that faction. It has always had good relations with east and west, and north and south. Though such relations may unavoidably be stronger at times, with some than with others.

At the Arab level Jordan has always attempted to do the same, and has generally succeeded while calling for overall Arab unity, integration or solidarity. It has rejected factions, cliques, and dubious groups.

This is indeed reassuring, and somewhat flattering even, not only because history eventually does justice to those who mean well and do well, but because it will help us enter the new world order confidently, adapt to it smoothly, compete in it, survive, and perhaps thrive and excel, with much hard work, of course.

There is no need to fear the new era, but there is a need to shed old thoughts and old ways, and work hard and prepare well for its advent.

No time to squander before May 1999

By Khalil Shikaki

BARELY, A year from now, the Oslo accords run out. Then what?

According to Article I of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) and the preamble to the Interim Agreement, the transitional period of the Palestinian self-government ends on May 4, 1999. Unless, by that date, a permanent settlement is reached — or a new interim agreement is reached, by the consent of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) — a political-legal vacuum will develop. Indeed, according to Article III (4) of the Interim Agreement, the mandate of the elected council and ra'is (head) of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) will end on that day.

The DOP of September 1993 and the Interim Agreement, signed in September 1995, provide principles and arrangements that govern Palestinian-Israeli relations for a five-year transitional period. In particular, Article XXXI(8) of the agreement stipulates that the "status of (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) will be preserved during the interim period." What's more, security, economic, and legal arrangements create a web of restrictions on the actions of the PNA. Some of the most important restrictions prevent the PNA from conducting foreign relations, building an army, providing for its own external defence, or assuming internal security functions in the so-called Area B sections of the West Bank. These restrictions remain in force as long as the interim period lasts — but no longer.

Israel is likely to argue that the Palestinian self-government has been established under the supreme authority of the Israeli military government and that, therefore, the source of authority after the end of the transitional period remains Israel. Recently, however, some members of the Israeli cabinet, including hardliners such as Ariel Sharon, have begun publicly to accept as inevitable the emergence of a Palestinian state by May 1999. In fact, in the past few months, informal Israeli offers may have been made to Palestinian interlocutors suggesting that an Israeli de facto recognition of a Palestinian state in about 40 per cent of the West Bank may be a reasonable price to pay in return for an end to the Oslo process, and with it the Israeli commitment to further redeployment.

The Palestinian position is that Israel was an occupying power until it withdrew from the areas now controlled by the PNA; sovereignty over these areas must therefore revert automatically to their inhabitants, the Palestinian people. Areas still under full Israeli control — Area C in Oslo parlance — remain subject to Security Council resolution 242, and to international law and norms governing occupied territories. Therefore, while the Palestinians can change the status of the areas under their control, Israel cannot, even after the transitional period ends.

To Palestinians, therefore, May 4, 1999, is indeed a "sacred" date. If the Israeli government chooses to ignore or underestimate its significance, it risks not only the political damage of a collapsed peace process, but also the prospect of a large-scale Israeli-Palestinian military confrontation, as the PNA declares independence and frees itself from the Oslo restrictions.

Israelis must realise that this outcome is not only conceivable, but perhaps even inevitable, for two reasons. First, to dispel any notion that today's limited self-government can become a permanent arrangement, the Palestinians must reject any extension of the transitional period. Second, Palestinians agreed to the interim period only because many of them concluded that it would be followed by independence. If the PLO wants Palestinian insistence on self-determination to be taken seriously by Israel and the rest of the world, it cannot allow a vacuum. It must demand that the world recognise the PNA as a state starting May 4, 1999.

If the two sides fail to reach a permanent settlement by mid-1999, and if the transitional period is not extended, the Oslo process will come to an end and the PLO will establish a Palestinian state. This scenario entails risks for both sides. For the Palestinians, the state will be established in only 30-40 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza, though they will continue to demand an end to Israeli occupation of the rest of Palestinian territory. The Israelis risk seeing the emergence of a fully sovereign Palestinian state that is free of treaty-imposed security and other restrictions. The state may not only have no peace agreement with Israel, but it may in fact be at war with it.

So it is in the interest of the two sides to speed up the peace process, not impede it. If a complete permanent settlement is not feasible in the short run, then a new short-term agreement must be contemplated. The new agreement must allow the establishment of a Palestinian state, freeze Israeli settlement activities, and speed up permanent settlement talks offering the Palestinians the expectation of the 1967 borders and the Israelis the prospect of establishing the new state's security obligations. There is no time left to squander.

The writer is a professor of political science at Al-Najah National University in Nablus and the director of the Centre for Palestine Research and Studies. This article is reprinted from the Jerusalem Report.

Iraqi lavishness hurts sanctions case

By Robin Wright and Craig Turner

WASHINGTON — As Iraq tried to persuade the United Nations last week to lift economic sanctions on the country, Iraqi leaders were facing a growing public-relations problem: New indications of lavish spending by President Saddam Hussein and his inner circle undercut their claim that the embargo has brought severe hardships.

The sanctions were renewed again last Monday because Iraq has not destroyed all of its weapons of mass destruction as required under the cease-fire agreement that ended the Gulf War in 1991.

Although the debate has been to focus on compliance with the weapons requirements, some allies view the suffering caused by the sanctions as a reason to ease the embargo.

Eight years after the United Nations imposed the sanctions, Iraq has lost an estimated $115 billion in oil revenue. Iraqi leaders contend that the sanctions are responsible for food shortages, malnutrition and premature deaths.

The sanctions have taken an enormous toll on the Iraqi people. But Western diplomats and specialists on the region say that many other factors are also responsible, including government inefficiency, domestic repression, ethnic discrimination — and spending by Saddam Hussein on such comforts as new palaces, which envoys were given access to for the first time this month.

Inside the compounds, envoys found imported marble, posh furnishings and elaborate landscaping, all paid for during the period the sanctions have been in effect.

There are other examples as well. When the Iraqi deputy prime minister, Tareq Aziz, travelled from Baghdad to New York in November to complain to the U.N. Security Council about the sanctions, he made the last leg of his trip, from Paris, on the world's most luxurious jetliner.

The Air France Concorde offered Mr. Aziz and his seven aides pampered service, haute cuisine and wines from the cellars of the best French chateaux.

The round-trip fare per person, according to the airline, was $8,453.20

Clearly, diplomats and observers say, Mr. Saddam and his inner circle have escaped the most punishing restrictions. But in the battle to influence world public opinion, they have exploited the hardships of ordinary citizens.

About the same time that Mr. Aziz was flying to New York, for example, Iraqi officials in Baghdad escorted U.S. and European journalists through the fly-infested paediatric ward of a hospital and blamed a growing list of malnutrition cases and medical shortages on the sanctions.

"Iraq has been utterly brilliant in the way it has played the sanctions card," said a Western diplomat who recently left Iraq. "It has turned punishment into a virtual asset in winning back acceptability and even helping the regime survive."

UNICEF estimates that more than 1 million children under age 5, or nearly one-third of all the children in that age group in Iraq, are chronically malnourished. But diplomats and aid workers have raised questions about the causes.

Many children in Baghdad hospitals are from Shiite Muslim and Kurdish areas that have been deliberately deprived of food and medical care by the largely Sunni Muslim government, diplomats say.

The problems with food are made worse by deeply ingrained inefficiency, envoys familiar with Iraq say.

"The system was hopelessly inefficient without a war," a diplomat said. "Add a war and the callousness of the regime, and you get dead and dying children."

Just how Iraq has spent a share of its limited resources was discovered this month by diplomats who escorted U.N. weapons inspectors through eight presidential palaces.

"They were beyond grandiose," a participant said.

That first inside look revealed palace compounds that contained a total of more than 1,000 buildings, with many more structures under construction.

The palaces had walls, floors and artistic flourishes crafted from elegant marble in many hues — material both telling and costly because marble is not indigenous to Iraq, the envoys said.

At the same time that Iraq was installing pumps for the palace moats and canals, the government said that it did not have such equipment for public sanitation sites in need of repair.

The eight compounds are among at least 48 new presidential sites built since the end of the Gulf War at a cost of as much as $2 billion, according to diplomatic estimates. That figure does not count furnishings.

A U.N. official stationed in Iraq said the regime was "obviously wasting money on palaces," although he did not agree that all suffering could be traced to the government.

The official said, for example, that child mortality was due in part to waterborne diseases such as typhoid that thrive because Iraq's sanitation system was seriously damaged during the Gulf War.

In 1996, the United Nations tried to ease the impact of the embargo on ordinary Iraqis by authorising the sale of nearly $2 billion in oil every six months so the government could buy food and medicine that would be distributed directly by U.N. workers.

This year, the ceiling has been raised to $5.2 billion, and the programme has been expanded to include U.N.-supervised repairs of power and sanitation facilities.

Despite official reports of as many as 1 million premature deaths and widespread famine, Iraq has experienced the biggest population surge in its history — from 17 million on the eve of the Gulf War to more than 21 million today.

Urban areas of Iraq not under repression have managed surprisingly well, according to diplomats and others in Iraq.

"Baghdad is not a starving city," said a diplomat who has done two tours in Iraq. "Iraqis in the street are well clothed and relatively well fed. Shops are well-stocked, though the variety is limited.

"The bazaar is in full swing of commercial activity. And there are enough late-model and luxury cars on the highways to suggest that it's not just a small clique profiting handsomely now."

— International Herald Tribune

Society on the move

Efforts recognised and rewarded

Dr. Kamel Abu Jaber is to be honoured in Alexandria, Egypt in early May for his contributions to the protection of the environment and the conservation of nature. Probably most recognised for his work as a political scientist and his career in public service as Minister of Economy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as head of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to the 1991 Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, as a member of the Upper House of Parliament and as head of the Institute of Diplomacy, Dr. Abu Jaber is also a founder of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). And back in the 80s he was editor of the RSCN's Reem magazine. On May 6, during the 8th International Conference on Environment, to be held in Alexandria, Dr. Abu Jaber will receive the Arab-European Cooperation Centre Award along with nine other Arab personalities from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

****

TWO HATS: *Director General of the Department of Palestinian Affairs Ibrahim Badran has been appointed by the Council of Ministers to take charge of all activities related to refugee affairs in the Kingdom. Dr. Badran, who was only last February appointed to the Palestinian affairs department, replaces Marwan Dudin in heading the refugee affairs activities for Jordan. He recently returned from a visit to Canada where he headed the Jordanian delegation to the Refugee Working Group of the multilateral track of the peace process which Ottawa is seeking to reactivate.*

****

KEEPING FOLKS MOVING: *Mahmoud Hamad Abdullat was elected secretary general of the Arab Union for Transportation (AUI), after a meeting of the AUT council held in Amman last month. Mr. Abdullat, who last December succeeded Marwan Dudin as in charge of the Amman district for the National Constitutional Party, when Mr. Dudin left for is government post as head of the Aqaba Region Authority. Mr. Abdullat has been in the transportation sector most of his career, starting earliest with the Civil Aviation Authority (and working on his masters at the same time) then as an advisor to the minister of transportation. He recently returned from the U.S. where he has been fulfilling requirements towards his Ph.D. in economics. The Arab Union for Transportation works under the umbrella of the Arab Ministers Council for Transportation of the Arab League.*

****

QUICK WORK: *The National Electricity Company (NECO) moved swiftly to name an acting director general to take the place vacated by the retirement of Mohammad Said Arafeh last week. Wadah Majed Nabulsi was selected from within NECO to take charge of the company as it prepares to split into three entities. Mr. Nabulsi has been with NECO and its predecessor the Jordan Electricity Authority as assistant secretary general.*

****

WITH THE RANK: *Jordan's ambassadors to Libya and Sudan have been in their respective posts for several months. But only last week were they officially promoted in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the rank of ambassador. Now whenever Ahmad Ali Mubeiddin, envoy to Tripoli, and Mohammad Tawfiq Khalidi, envoy to Khartoum, return to home base they will retain the rank of ambassador and no longer minister plenipotentiary.*

****

IN MEMORY: *A young engineer who in 1994 published a book about Jordan's Queen Mother, has issued a new edition of the book on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Her Majesty Queen Zein Al Sharaf. Ahmad Ali Muhalab, 28, was born in Kuwait and came to Jordan during the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. He says he became interested in the life and work of Queen Zein after watching the emotional reunion with her son, His Majesty King Hussein, on the steps of her home when the King returned from the U.S. following his successful surgery in 1992. Mr. Muhalab's latest work, which he published in 1997, contains a biography of the late Queen, her achievements in humanitarian work, and the last letter she wrote to King Hussein. The 247-page illustrated publication also contains copies of the numerous letters of condolence sent to the Hashemite family from notables from around the Kingdom upon Queen Zein's passing on April 26, 1994. In Arabic, the book, entitled, Um Al Hussein, is available from Mr. Muhalab directly at 743-567.*

***

CAVIAR? *If anyone noticed the advertisement placed in the Arabic dailies by Royal Jordanian announcing that it is recruiting women flight attendants trainees who can speak English and Farsi, you guessed it, RJ is planning to resume its flights to Tehran in early June.*

****

ELECTIONS: *European university alumni make the news again. This time it was the French University Alumni in Jordan which elected its new general council: Dr. Sami Sharif, president; Dr. Jamil Abu Ahmad, vice president; Mohammad Attab, secretary general; Bassam Abu Selem, treasurer; and Aid Makhadmeh, Dr. Abdullah Qudah, and Dr. Michel Dababneh as members.*

****

AND MORE ELECTIONS: *In Zarqa the Chechen Society has elected Abdul Baqi Jammo as president of the administrative council, and the Circassian Society has elected Ghazi Balqar as president of its administrate council. The Chechen council members elected last week were Khalil Sander, vice president, Abdullah Haddad, secretary general, Amin Kheir, treasurer, and Mohammad Issa, Amer Yousef Arslan, Nabil Kamel Ahmad Nadhmi, Ahmad Bina, Mahmoud Bino, Mohammad Zuheir Taher, Kheireddin Dawhleh, and Shaker Shafiq as members. The Circassian Society elected Ihsan Shabsou, secretary general, Mohammad Zaki Hajqari, treasurer, Amer Ramzi, Awni Bakir, Mohammad Abdul Rahman, Nibal Ahmad Khaled Yahyah, and Houriya Daden as members.*

Models take to the runway Wednesday at the fashion and jewellery show by designers Rizwan Beyg and Amina Hassan Ali of Pakistan

****

SILKS AND SILVER: *If you were not among the 175 people to attend Wednesday's fashion show featuring the "must have" day and evening wear of Pakistani designer Rizwan Beyg, and the glittering jewellery of Amina Hassan Ali, there's still today (Thursday). The designs of both designers will be on display all day that the Marriott Hotel. Wednesday's show, organised by the Pakistani Women's Association, was attended by association patron HRH Princess Sarvath, and Their Royal Highnesses Princess Rahma and Princess Alia Faisal, Ruweida Tarawneh, wife of Royal Court Chief Dr. Farez Tarawneh, and Mrs. Talal Hassan, wife of the minister of culture. According to PWA President Maria Khan, all proceeds from sales at the events will go to the Young Muslim Women's Association charitable projects. Mr. Beyg and Ms. Ali, who are in Jordan for the show, will return to Pakistan on Friday.*

****

AN AMERICAN FIRST: *Starting in May the American Center of the U.S. Embassy will present its first American Arts Festival. To be inaugurated by Her Majesty Queen Noor on May 10, the festival is meant to combine the talents of both American and Jordanian artists, says U.S. Counsellor for Press and Cultural Affairs Marcelle Wahba. The participating American artists, jewellery designer Suzanne El Masry, and classical guitarist Jad Azkoul, are, obviously, of Arab origin. The other participating artists are sculptor Samer Tabbaa, oudist Sakher Hanar, and Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, founder and curator of the International Council on Women in the Arts. Opening Day, May 10, will feature exhibitions of Egyptian-born Ms. Masry's jewellery, and Saudi Arabian-born Mr. Tabbaa's sculptures, both displayed under the theme, "Sculptured Designs." The exhibitions will open at 6:00 p.m. at the American Center Exhibit Halls and remain on display through May 25. In addition, on May 13, Ms. Masry will conduct a workshop on "New Jewellery Design Techniques" with the Dana Nature Reserve Project of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. As all the festival events are open to the public free of charge, it's advisable to reserve your seats for a classical guitar evening May 11 with Jad Azkoul whose programme is to include pieces by Villa-Lobos, Abel Carlevaro, Antonio Lauro, and Laonrival Silvestre. The concert will take place in the American Center courtyard. Mr. Azkoul will also conduct a workshop at the National Music Conservatory on May 12 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.*

Many will remember the highly acclaimed exhibition, "Forces of Change: Women Artists of the Arab World," organised by Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi and which toured the U.S. for two years. On May 12 in the AC auditorium, Ms. Nashashibi will lecture at 6:00 p.m. on "The Politics of Identity: Contemporary Arab Art in the U.S."

And on May 13, "East Meets West" when Jad Azkoul teams up with oudist Sakher Hatar of Jordan for a concert in the courtyard at 7:00 p.m. Again seat reservations are advisable for this concert. (Tel. 592-0101, ext. 2579.)

Jennifer Hamarneh

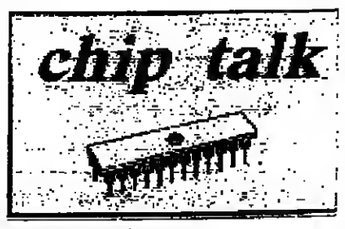
Rx for headaches

By Jean-Claude Elias

DEALING WITH personal computers is like dealing with life itself – it's nothing but headaches. At the same time they are becoming more powerful than ever in terms of processing power, data storage and possibilities, PCs are bringing us a huge load of problems.

Whereas the hardware has its share of annoyances with its extra sensitivity to power imperfections and random failures, it remains far less problematic than software. Indeed, in spite of the complexity of the CPU (the central processing unit, the core of every PC) and the other electronic devices inside a computer they are still under better control than the hypersophisticated operating systems like MS-Windows and some of its application programmes.

On a regular basis, users have to confront issues like computer viruses, programmes re-installation and un-installation, erroneous installations, sudden system crash, incompatibility of devices, hard disk fragmentation and so forth. The industry's answer is a series of software modules designed to reduce the headache that could result from any of the above cases.



The best known type of PC medicine is the virus scanner. Norton Anti Virus, McAfee VirusScan and the evocative PcCillin are the most commonly found. Cleansweep and Uninstall let users safely remove installed programmes they do not wish to use anymore, without damaging Windows. For one is not supposed to remove an application that runs under Windows by simply erasing (deleting) it from the hard disk.

Other pieces of preventive or curative PC medicine are appropriately called Dr. Watson, First Aid or Nuts and Bolts. They aim to prevent problems before they occur or to repair damaged pieces of software.

Using them however is not an amateur's work. First Aid particularly has proven to be difficult to use though it is a good addition to Windows 95. The irony is that all the above goodies are but programmes! They can generate errors and system crash just like the software they are designed to protect or fix. Worse than the potential hazard they represent, using them in an erroneous way can lead to real disasters. Apart from the well-known virus scanners that can be operated by any user, computer professionals recommend the utmost care when running software like Uninstall or First Aid.

Cases where Cleansweep, supposed to remove only the programme you would tell it to uninstall, has also deleted essential Windows files are common. The error often is caused by the user's lack of technical knowledge and not by flaws in the software itself. Other consequences of wrong usage of PC medicine range from loss of data to the complete failure to work of the computer.

Cleansweep, Nuts and Bolts, Dr. Watson and the like are truly like drugs. They can be very efficient but should be used carefully and not without a good reason. And although some of them have become as ordinary as aspirin, I wish their manufacturers would tag them with the "keep out of reach of children" warning.

Iranian prisoner of war 'returns from the dead'

By Julian Borger

EIGHTEEN YEARS after his jet fighter disappeared over Iraq, Hossein Lashkari has returned from the dead.

Iraq had kept his existence a secret and his comrades had given him up as lost. But the Iranian pilot survived torture and more than a decade in solitary confinement to emerge as a reminder of one of this century's most brutal wars.

His release this month, 10 years after the Iran-Iraq conflict ended, was part of a prisoner exchange motivated by both countries' need to emerge from regional isolation. In recent weeks Iran has freed more than 5,000 Iraqis. In return Saddam Hussein, who long claimed to hold no Iranian prisoners of war, produced Flight Lieutenant Lashkari and 318 other Iranian PoWs.

In an interview at a Tehran Air-Force Base, the pilot, aged 45 and promoted to the rank of general since his release, said he had been subjected to physical and mental torture and kept in isolation for 10 years in a string of Baghdad villas converted into dungeons. He was the ace up President Saddam's sleeve, a hostage to be used only when necessary.

In 1980, soon after the Iran-Iraq war began, his F4 fighter caught fire during a sortie and he ejected. "I'm not sure if I was hit or what caused the fire. I was flying low and the parachute opened not long before I hit the ground, so I came down hard and passed out. When I came to, Iraqi doctors were stitching up my mouth," Gen. Lashkari said.

The Iraqis removed his bed and forced the wounded pilot to stand during interrogations. After 48 hours he was taken to Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad and the professionals got to work on him. "They attached metal brushes to sensitive parts of my anatomy and gave me electric shocks. They heat the soles of my feet — 100 or 120 strokes until I passed out.

"And then there was psychological torture as well. They would come to my cell 30 or 40 times a night, just to ask me my name and number. They also blindfolded me and tied me up and drove me out of Baghdad at night. They took me off the road and fired into the air above my head."

He was asked for information his interrogators could have found in the international press. He now believes his torturers were more interested in testing their techniques and assessing his resistance and training. Released Iraqi prisoners have also alleged maltreatment and torture in captivity in Iran.

A million soldiers are thought to have died in the inconclusive eight-year war. After the 1988 ceasefire, mutual distrust remained intense. About 70,000 prisoners were sent home in 1990 but many more were held back as bargaining counters. Talks are under way to exchange the last POWs, but no one seems sure how many there are.

After the war ended, Gen. Lashkari's conditions worsened. After eight years sharing a cell with other Iranians, he was moved on his own to a series of houses in Baghdad. "From the outside these places looked like expensive villas. Inside there were manacles and bars on the windows," Gen. Lashkari said.

He spent the next 10 years in solitary, exchanging the odd word with Iraqi guards. As the years went by, he overheard only fragments of news — about the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Gulf war he could hear the bombs falling. The Iraqis told the Red Cross of his existence only in 1996.

Gen. Lashkari says he owes his sanity to his Islamic faith and to the order he imposed on his life.

"I allotted every task a certain time so that I ended up feeling I needed an extra two hours in every 24," he said.

This feat of self-discipline has left the grey-bearded pilot withdrawn and deadpan. When he first telephoned his wife, Havva, from a hotel on the border, he greeted her formally. "Do you recognise my voice?" he asked. Havva broke down in tears.

The family was reunited three weeks ago in front of a scrum of dignitaries, well-wishers and television cameras. When Hossein and Havva finally found each other, they shook hands and exchanged formal pleasantries. As he embraced his son Ali (whom he had last seen as a three-month-old infant), his first words to the young man were: "Why are you wearing glasses?" He admitted later: "It was all I could think of saying."

As Iran's longest-serving PoW, Gen. Lashkari has been proclaimed its foremost national hero. He has been filmed at national shrines and listening intently to the ayatollahs. Havva has been declared an Exemplary Wife. Their home life has been subjected to relentless media scrutiny.

When the young flight lieutenant last saw Iran in 1980, the revolution was only a few months old. It is now riven with disputes and riddled with corruption. As is to be expected, every faction has attempted to identify itself with the airman. "Little wonder," said one embittered war veteran watching the pilot-hero eulogised for the umpteenth time on television. "He is everything the revolution was supposed to be and so obviously has not become."

— The Guardian

Sahara tribe first to reach for the stars

By Tim Radford

STONE AGE people built the first astronomical observatory centuries before anyone thought. Scientists working in the Sahara have identified a series of megaliths that predate Stonehenge in Britain and other sites by more than 1,000 years.

Around 6,500 years ago an unknown people living in Nabta, in southern Egypt, began dragging slabs of stone, nearly 3 metres high, into position on the west bank of the Nile.

The alignments run north-south and east-west, and point to the sun where astronomers estimate its solstice would have been 6,000 years ago.

"This is the oldest documented astronomical alignment of megaliths in the world," says Professor McKim Malville of the University of Colorado at Boulder, who — with colleagues from the United States, Egypt and Poland — has completed a satellite survey of the stones. "A lot of effort went into the construction of a purely symbolic and ceremonial site."

The ruins are beside what would have been the shoreline of a lake that filled with water about 11,000 years ago when the African monsoon moved north. It was used by nomads until 4,800 years ago, when the rainfall patterns shifted, and the area became arid and uninhabitable.

Five alignments radiate out from a central collection of stones. Beneath one was a carved rock resembling a cow standing upright.

The researchers report that they found the remains of several buried cattle, including a skeleton laid to rest in a clay-lined chamber. There were cinders from ancient hearths, and fragments of decorated ostrich eggs.

The stones are mute evidence of a vanished world — and a foretaste of the pyramid builders who would arrive 1,500 or 2,000 years later.

The stones are mute evidence of a vanished world — and a foretaste of the pyramid builders who would arrive 1,500 or 2,000 years later. Neolithic herdsmen came to Nabta, probably from further south in Africa, and used cattle in their rituals just as Masai tribesmen do today, says Prof. Malville.

Because Nabta was close to the Tropic of Cancer, the noon sun would be directly overhead and for a brief while each day, the standing stones would cast no shadows.

"These vertical sighting stones correspond to the zenith sun during the summer solstice," he says. "For many cultures in the tropics, the zenith sun has been a major event for millennia."

Some of the other alignments are still puzzling the archaeo-astronomers — scientists who specialise in interpreting patterns in stone left by vanished civilisations. Some of the monoliths would probably have been submerged in the lake and may have "marked" the onset of the rainy season. "The organisation of these objects suggest a symbolic geometry that integrated death, water and the sun," says Prof. Malville.

The discovery points to a world peopled by nomadic herdsmen prepared to face daunting conditions.

The "high" culture of the Egyptians is traditionally thought to have been borrowed from Mesopotamia and Syria. But the forgotten stonemasons of Nabta clearly understood symbolism: Prof. Malville and his colleagues believe that they, rather than the Assyrians or the Babylonians, may have triggered the social complexity that ended in the pyramids of the Pharaohs.

EC revives 'Med-Programmes' after temporary suspension

By Ghalia Alul
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — European Commission (EC) "Med Programmes" are set to resume soon after a two-year suspension. Yves Gazzo, the head of the EC Delegation to Jordan, told the Jordan Times Wednesday.

These programmes aim at facilitating cooperation between civil societies and promoting closer ties and better understanding between the people of Europe and the Mediterranean states, a statement by the EC Delegation said.

"The relaunch is good news...it will keep the door open for cooperation between entities," said Mr. Gazzo.

In 1995, the commission took the decision to temporarily suspend these programmes in order to reexamine and improve the management systems and mechanisms, the statement said.

"The commission decided to suspend the decentralised cooperation programmes because the management set up was neither proper nor satisfactory," Mr. Gazzo said.

Med-Urbs, Med-Campus and Med-Media programmes will proceed with new management and control measures, falling within the framework of the European Union's financial instrument — MEDA programme — which allocated, 4.7 billion ECUs (some $5.8 billion) for the 12 Mediterranean partners for 1995-1999.

According to the statement, Med-Campus establishes networks between universities from the north and south of the Mediterranean to encourage the exchange of experiences and know-how.

Med-Urbs aims to improve the living conditions of people in urban areas and develop cooperation between local authorities.

Med-Media aims to develop networks in the media and journalistic fields (limited to the training sectors).

About 10 per cent of the budget allocated under MEDA programme will be earmarked for these programmes, according to Mr. Gazzo.

The statement said decentralised cooperation programmes, which facilitate collaboration between civil societies, constitute only a small part of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the framework of MEDA programme.

It added that these programmes are however an important element in Euro-Mediterranean relations. Between 1992 and 1995 more than 470 networks were created bringing together around 2,000 partners from civil societies who received some 67 million ECUs (European Currency Units) in grants through these programmes.

Of the 70 suspended Med-Media programmes, the Amman-based Jemstone project and its sister programme, Remfoc in the Maghreb continued to operate with special EU funding.

Jemstone Director Tudor Lomas said although the EC has indicated that Jemstone will be part of the relaunch, it did not say which of the 70 projects will be eligible for funding.

"I'm happy that the whole notion of Med Media survived...But the EC did not set a time scale for the relaunch," Mr. Lomas told the Jordan Times. "..We hope (Jemstone) will be around well into the next century."

Jemstone project has prepared a list of ambitious activities for this year to increase contacts and understanding between journalists and media professionals in Europe and the 12 countries for North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Mr. Lomas had said that Jemstone links over 50 of the main newspaper, news agencies and broadcasters in these countries as well as over 350 of the region's best journalists.

Israel trying to decrease financial dependence on U.S.

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel, long the major recipient of U.S. aid, is negotiating to scale back the largesse now that its maturing economy is turning 50.

Israel, which has received $3 billion annually in U.S. aid for the past 13 years, currently has an annual per capita gross domestic product of $17,000, higher than Spain's.

The Jewish state also has one of the world's strongest and most innovative high-technology sectors.

Of the U.S. subsidies, $1.8 billion goes for weapons purchases. Israel is still technically in a state of war with most of its neighbours in the Middle East.

The other $1.2 billion is civilian aid, which the Jewish state has used to pay back $10 billion in loans borrowed from the United States between 1973 and 1984.

It is this fund that Israel is seeking to phase out over 10 years, and an agreement may be concluded next week in Washington, Israeli public radio said.

The aid was vital for Israel during the hyperinflation of the 1980s, which reached more than 400 per cent annually at one point and threatened to bankrupt the economy.

Rapid economic growth and healthier account balances have since reduced the importance of U.S. aid, which is now comparable to three per cent of GDP (gross domestic product), according to the Bank of Israel, the country's central bank.

In 1986, U.S. subsidies represented 10 per cent of GDP, the bank said.

It is increasingly difficult to justify such high levels of aid to the Jewish state, and Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu decided to make the first move by offering to phase out civilian aid in negotiations that began in January.

He hopes to obtain, in return, an additional $600 million in military assistance.

In addition, Mr. Netanyahu would like to change the military-aid terms so that 50 per cent of it may be used to purchase arms from Israeli military industries.

Under the current arrangement, only 25 per cent may go to buy weapons from Israeli companies while the rest must be spent on purchases from U.S. companies.

The switch could infuriate the U.S. arms lobby, which would see their Israeli orders fall.

Israel also came to the end of its $10 billion in U.S. banking guarantees at the beginning of this year.

The guarantees, which were granted in 1993 and enabled the Jewish state to get low-interest loans, were intended to help finance the integration of new immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

After the influx waned, Washington authorised Israel in 1995 to use the loan money to develop its infrastructure.

"Reaching the end of these guarantees doesn't worry us, as Israel enjoys a very good international reputation," said a senior finance official, who asked not to be identified.

Israel has accumulated $20 billion in foreign currency reserves and "has plenty of options for finding funds," he said.

Mr. Netanyahu believes the time is ripe for Israel to reduce its dependence on the United States and to join the club of industrialised nations.

As a symbol of that maturity, Israel is liberalising restrictions on its currency, the shekel, for the country's 50th anniversary, which falls on April 30 according to the Hebrew calendar.

Under the reform, Israeli individuals and businesses will be able to freely purchase foreign currencies, invest or open bank accounts abroad and use foreign currencies for transactions in Israel.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc

ARIES: (March 21-April 19) — Ignore an upset this evening. It is only a temporary condition. Good times and pleasant dreams are definitely predicted for your place tonight. There may be a couple of bassles along the way, but everything will turn out fine.

TAURUS: (April 20-May 20) — You are strong and very capable, and you are learning quickly. Listen attentively to a friend first thing this morning and put his or her advice to use. It seems to be about managing your time the way you manage your money.

GEMINI: (May 21-June 21) — Call in all the money everybody else owes you. If your boss promised you a bonus, mention that again, too. He or she should be in a generous mood. You have been producing results pretty well lately. Later, treat yourself to something new.

CANCER: (June 22-July 22) — Your friends are coming to you for advice, and with good reasons. You give terrific advice! You are practical, hardworking and compassionate. Besides helping them stay on track financially, you can also help your friends emotionally. That is why so many of them call on you.

LEO: (July 23-August 22) — Have you checked over your insurance policies lately? If not, consult with an expert this morning. There is an indication you could save more and get better coverage at the same time. If you have a date tonight, stay close at home. That way you won't be dismayed if you run into a detour.

VIRGO: (August 23-September 22) — You have a friend who is in an enviable position. You may wish a little of that luck would rub off on you. Well, there might be a way to make that happen. Shadow this person and learn valuable skills. You are lucky and smart. This will be fun.

LIBRA: (September 23-October 23) — Opportunities are abounding. What is it would like to achieve in the next five years? Financial security? A nice home? A happy family? All of the above? Once you know what you want, it will be a lot easier to make the right choice.

SCORPIO: (October 24-November 21) — Give up on the idea of getting away from work early. That is probably not going to happen. The odds are good that you will have a marvellous time later on, however. If you and your sweetheart can go to a romantic place near water, you could create an experience worth writing home about.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22-December 21) — This is your formula for success: technical skills combined with the support of a roommate or loved one, plus your own hard work. You also have to pay attention to details, and there don't appear to be any short-cuts. Not today, anyway. Just keep plugging away at it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22-January 19) — You and your partner are showing everybody else how it should be done. Nearby is a person with experience, compassion, intelligence and intuition. If you team up with somebody like that — and add your perseverance and determination — miracles can happen.

AQUARIUS: (January 20-February 18) — You need to be political. You have to watch for innuendoes and gestures, to know whether you are winning or losing. You would rather be dealing with something mechanical. If the thing works, it works. If it doesn't work, it doesn't. The game is not that simple today, so pay attention.

PISCES: (February 19-March 20) — Everything goes well for you today, because you are coming from such a beautiful place. It is the emotional state you are in. Others look at your and wish they could be like that. Don't be upset by a lack of money. The most valuable thing is love, and you have plenty of that.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc

ARIES: (March 21-April 19) — If you take the advice of a friend and a bureaucrat, not necessarily in that order, you can put in a correction that will make you much more effective. If this does not make sense, just follow the advice of anybody in a position to know what they are talking about.

TAURUS: (April 20-May 20) — You don't know everything yet, but you are learning, and it is noticeable. You will get a good opportunity this afternoon, so make sure you are paying attention. You have got lots of energy and you are interested in the topic. How lucky can you get?

GEMINI: (May 21-June 21) — Money could come into your account today, and it is about time. You have been waiting for quite a while, and putting up with something at home that needs replacing. Plan to go shopping for a new one tonight or tomorrow night. Either would be good times for finding a bargain.

CANCER: (June 22-July 22) — You are in the spotlight and that is OK. You also look like the recipient of more responsibility. Are you in a position where you have to take care of other people's money? If not, that could happen soon. And it looks like you will be good at it, too.

LEO: (July 23-August 22) — You could make more money this morning with little effort. Look for a way to increase your income, possibly by taking on another job. Your skills are in demand. You may hear about an opportunity from a friend around dinnertime. This is an insider tip, so don't tell anyone where you heard it.

VIRGO: (August 23-September 22) — Something you do not want anymore would make a wonderful gift for friend in need. It is just taking up space and you would like to get it out of your closet. Not only will you be doing good deed, but you will be bringing even more favourable attention to yourself.

LIBRA: (September 23-October 23) — You could say or do something today to greatly further your career. The opportunity will come quickly and must be acted on quickly. You are definitely up for the challenge, especially if you can figure it out ahead of time and be in the right place when it happens.

SCORPIO: (October 24-November 21) — It looks like money is coming into your account. This is a surprise. There is plenty of work, but a friend is helping with that, so it is a lot easier. And you may be able, finally, to pay of a big debt. That is a marvellous feeling.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22-December 21) — This would be a good day to pay off a bill. I looks more like it will take ingenuity on your part. Maybe you will pay off one credit card with another, and get a lower interest rate. That is not the same as paying it off, but it is better than nothing.

CAPRICORN: (December 22-January 19) — You are under pressure, but you are not in the battle alone anymore. You have got a good partner, who can do some of your chores even better than you can. Let it happen. If you are working with the right person, the two of you will be absolutely awesome.

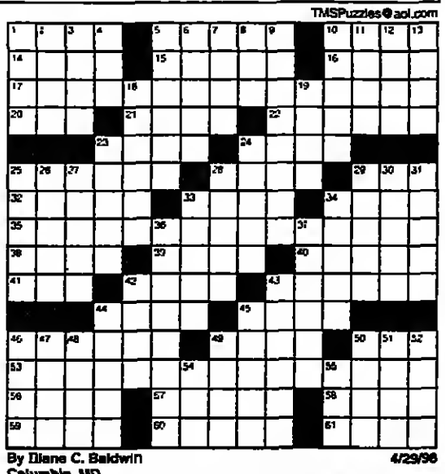
AQUARIUS: (January 20-February 18) — Not only do you have a lot of work already, but there is more coming in every minute. You could easily talk yourself into being overwhelmed, if you had the time. Luckily, you don't. Instead, keep reminding yourself how smart you are and how good you are at figuring things out.

PISCES: (February 19-March 20) — Everything looks rosy. And speaking of roses, this would be a marvellous day to plant some. You are adept at making things grow. You are also good at nurturing people. You will see the results of your labours in a variety of ways.

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



ACROSS
1 Chime
5 Founded
10 Abhor
14 Bassoon's cousin
15 Orchard fruit
16 All aflutter
17 Hint of the whole
20 Get it?
21 __ back (relaxed)
22 Comes along
23 Burden
24 Tie tie
25 Hereditary
28 Humble homes
29 Fast flier's letters
32 Henry, the sculptor
33 Adjutant
34 Until
35 Last chance for second thoughts
38 Being: Lat.
39 Gear teeth
40 "Star Trek" co-star
41 Confederate general
42 Sioux tribe
43 Upper-arm bulge
44 Italian car
45 One-celled plant
46 Under the weather
49 Biblical land
50 Winter runner
53 Cliffhanger situation
56 Leisure
57 Song for nine voices
58 Pastel red
59 Former Russian ruler
60 Penn and Connery
61 Martial __

DOWN
1 Kiddies
2 Theater award
3 Easy gait
4 Zodiac sign
5 Luzon island battle site
6 Plant louse
7 Stepped on it
8 Inventor Whitney
9 Wine container
10 Nun's attire
11 Lifetimes
12 Ripped
13 Custard ingredients
18 Broccoli piece
19 Love god
23 "Bonanza" star Greene
24 Accolade
25 Drive forward
26 Hangman's knot
27 Western state capital
28 Door hardware
29 Foam
30 Razor sharpener
31 Theater awards
33 Underway
34 City on the Mohawk
36 Stop signs, e.g.
37 Mystery
42 Sty cry
43 Explosions
44 More splendid
45 Green card holder
46 Help out on a heist
47 Pension accts.
48 "David and __"
49 Author Ferber
50 Be up and about
51 English county
52 Annoys
54 Enemy
55 Fat farm

By Diane C. Baldwin
Columbia, MD
4/29/98

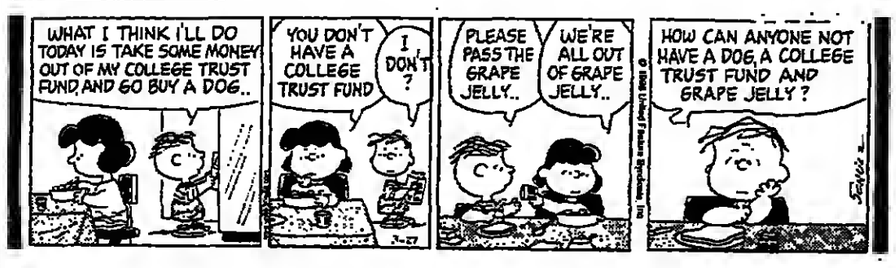
Tuesday's Puzzle Solved

S	N	O	B		M	A	C	O	N		C	A	R	T
H	U	L	A		A	G	A	P	E		E	W	E	R
E	M	I	R		R	E	N	E	W		L	A	N	E
	B	O	N	N	I	E	A	N	D	C	L	Y	D	E
			S	O	N				E	D	O			
A	B	C		R	A	S	C	A	L	S		B	R	A
T	R	A	I	T		L	A	S	H		B	A	I	L
B	U	T	C	H	C	A	S	S	I	D	Y	A	N	D
A	N	T	E		H	I	T	E		R	E	E	S	E
T	O	Y		V	A	N	E	S	S	A		O	E	N
			P	S	I				A	P	E			
T	H	E	S	U	N	D	A	N	C	E	K	I	D	
H	E	R	A		S	A	G	E	R		I	R	I	S
A	R	I	L		A	D	E	L	E		N	O	V	A
T	E	E	M		W	O	R	L	D		G	N	A	T

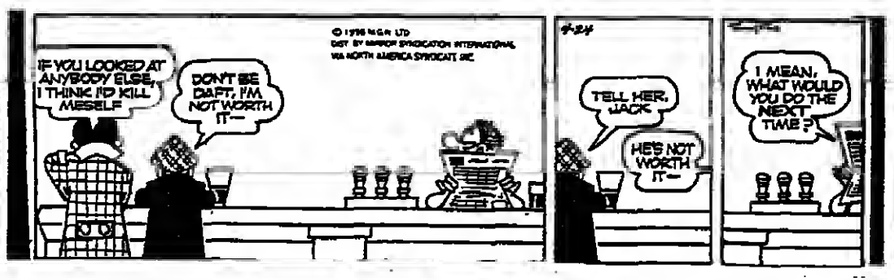
(C)1998 Tribune Media Services, Inc. All rights reserved.

4/29/98

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff

THE BETTER HALF.

By Glasbergen

"I can't be past my prime. I never had a prime!"

JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

MAALL

DEGAL

FEBRYL

FORLEG

©1998 Tribune Media Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here: (Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: SMOKY MINUS FLORAL UPSHOT
Answer: How the barber shop quartet settled their spat — HARMONIOUSLY

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Jordan Islamic Bank adds newly posted lower profit to retained earnings

** THE JORDAN Islamic Bank posted a JD3.15 million net profit last year compared to JD5.60 million recorded in 1996. However, the bank will transfer the profit to retained earnings because it awarded the sharebolders a free quarter share bonus for each share held by them and floated shares for private subscription at par value without an "issuance premium" surcharge. "This sbould compensate and even be higher than distributing cash dividends, the bank said.

According to the annual report, the hank's total assets at the end of last year amoooted to JD650.62 millioo compared to JD618.66 million at the end of 1996. Off-balance items such as letters of credits, guarantees and acceptances totalled JD24.69 million (JD40.11 million in 1996). Cash io hand and at banks increased from JD135.34 millioo at the end of 1996 to JD162.76 millioo at the end of 1997.

Other figures showed total financing and investments totalling JD461.87 million compared to JD457.95 million at the end of 1996. Various types of deposits were higher by JD27.36 millioo as they increased from JD524.54 million to JD551.90 millioo.

The report indicated that the bank extended low-interest credits that benefited 7,644 persons. The balance of these soft loans has increased from JD1.66 million at the end of 1996 to JD2.03 million at the end of 1997. The total of net fixed assets iocreased by about half a million to reach JD15.47 million.

Board Chairman Mohammad Hasoubeh told the shareholders that the bank's future plan aims at continuing to widen and to diversify banking services and at consolidating the expansion in financing craftsmen and small industries. The hank also will stress dealing in bonds by cootinuously issuing investment portfolios and diversifying the investment components of these portfolios.

Mr. Hasoubeh highlighted in his address that among many financing deals, the bank extended a JD7 million financing to tbe National Electricity Company. He pointed out that the share of the Jordan Islamic Bank of the total financiog of all the banks in Jordan was around 9.11 per cent. He said the shareholders' equity has risen to JD49.6 million with the capital adequacy ratio standing at 15.26 per cent which is a level higher than the 12 per cent ratio required by the Central Bank (Al Ra'i + Al Aswaq).

Economic slump good news for some in Japan

TOKYO (AFP) — Japan's economic slump has turned up some unlikely pickings for canny entrepreneurs who can even provide a fake job for those embarassed about unemployment.

Manufacturers of safes are also enjoying a boom as people lose faith in shaky banks.

And temporary job agencies are giving new flexibility to corporations that are no longer willing to risk giving permanent employment to incompetent graduates.

Eitchi Seki, president of Create Corp., has found a new niche for bis 15-year-old business, which provides clients with the illusion of having their own office.

Pay your subscription, and Create Corp. can help you to fool family and friends into believing you still have a job weeks after your boss has fired you.

While you lounge around in the bar, telephone operators of Create Corp. will take calls meant for you and explain that you've just popped out and will call them back.

Most of Seki's longer-term customers are industrious enterpreneurs who want to save the cost of an office and still reassure clients in Japan, where people place more trust in organisations than individuals.

Young women working in the sex industry account for a small proportion of the clientele.

But "an increasing number of senior men who have been laid off are becoming our customers," Seki said, as the jobless executives want to fool their families and acquaintances.

When calls come in, a Create Corp. operator, posing as your fake company's secretary, will contact you later on your mobile telephone or wherever else you desire and inform you of your incoming messages.

A basic contract to provide you with an illusory employer's telephone number is 20,000 yen ($155) a month.

"We issue pay slips if the customer deposits and withdraws his own money," Seki said. "I can meet any request of my customers as far as they don't violate the law."

And there's no need to worry about operators getting mixed up on the story by confusing you with another client — the right script pops up on a tiny screen in the telephone machine whenever it rings.

Create Corp. can handle hundreds of numbers with only three telephone machines, as a computer connected to them recognises incoming calls, specifies the correct answers and feed them to idle lines.

Seki operates six-to-seven of some 500 such offices in Tokyo and serves 1,000 people.

The crisis in Japan's financial sector has also provided a business opening as many people choose to keep their cash in a safe at home rather than at shaky banks which in any case pay hardly any interest.

"Orders are outpacing production thanks to these 'closet deposits'," said Hiroshi Doi at the nation's largest home safe manufacturer, King Industrial Co. Ltd.

"We saw orders pickiog up unexpectedly after Hokkaido Takushoku Bank Ltd. failed in mid-November," he said. Hokkaido was the first of Japan's top 10 banks to go under since World War II.

The spectacular fall of the country's fourth-largest broker, Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd., in late November last year, added further fuel to the demand for safes.

King's monthly production stands at 15,000 money boxes a month, up 50 per cent since the financial sector's woes struck.

Its most popular safes are as big as microwave ovens and are priced at 40,000-50,000 yen (310-390 dollars). Most buyers are in their 50s and 60s, Doi said.

New-style temporary job agencies, popular in the West hut formerly scarce in Japan, are also riding on the economic slump.

More and more companies want to cut their intake of school graduates who need on-the-job training.

Katsuyoshi Mita, general marketing manager of Staff Service Co. Ltd., said his firm is now providing those firms with the "right people for the right period at the right time."

According to the latest labour ministry data, some 720,000 people were registered at job agencies at the end of March 1997, up 18.3 per cent from a year earlier.

Some 300,000 people of them were working on contracts. Women accounted for 70 per cent, but the number of men was estimated to bave risen at least 10 per cent over the past few years, Mita said.

Workshop opens on advanced banking techniques

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordanian exports have grown by almost 10 per cent over the past five years, Mohammad Halaiqah, the secretary general of the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the deputy chairman of the board of directors of the Jordan Export Development Corporation (JEDCO), said Wedoesday.

Addressing the opening session of a workshop on export finance and credit guarantees in Jordan, Dr. Halaiqah said Jordanian exports have reached 107 world markets in 1997.

Farouq Al Hadidi, the acting director general of JEDCO said the workshop aims to brief exporters on the finance and credit guarantee programme available to Jordanian exporters noting that demand for such a programme is still below the expectations.

Ceotral Bank of Jordan (CBJ) expert Mohammad Quteish reviewed the general conditions for giving advances to licensed banks against export letters of credit and other technical banking procedures.

Golda Amis, advisor for the Investment Financing Programme, said the government had signed a $40 million agreement with the World Bank to finance this activity. She noted that the CBJ will releod the total amount through several licensed banks in Jordan, which have agreed to participate in the relending process in accordance with certain conditions.

Egypt, U.S. and Japan set up first private sector petrochemicals firm

CAIRO (AFP) — An Egyptian private-sector group has signed an agreemeot with U.S. and Japanese petrocbemical giants for the construction of a $445 million petrochemical complex, the oil ministry has said.

The deal was signed between Egypt's Sharqiya Company for Petroleum, Union Carbide of the United States and Japan's Toyo company, a spokesman for the oil ministry said.

It stipulated the creation of Egypt's "first private-sector petrochemical complex" for total investments worth 1.5 billion pounds ($445 million), said the spokesman who was unable to give each compaoy's share of the deal.

The new firm will produce 120,000 tonnes of polypropylene each year worth 375 million pounds ($125 million).

REUTERS REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates — Prices as at 29/04/98 18:06

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.7922	0.5985	1.4926	131.88	1.4369	1771.80	2.0192	6.0135
DE Mark	0.5580	-	0.3336	0.8328	73.54	0.8015	987.85	1.1260	3.3538
GB Sterling	1.6708	2.9966	-	2.4951	220.43	2.4008	2960.68	3.3741	10.0486
CH Franc	0.6700	120.00	0.4004	-	88.35	0.9626	1185.79	135.14	4.0246
JP Yen	0.0076	1.3583	0.4533	1.1310	-	1.0889	13.42	152.91	4.5529
CA Dollar	0.6959	1.2916	0.4225	1.0566	1.09	-	1270.80	1.4551	4.3265
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0117	0.3376	0.0842	1344.81	0.8112	-	11.38	3.3914
NL Guilder	0.4952	88.78	0.2963	73.94	65.32	0.7120	876.99	-	2.9767
FR Franc	0.1663	0.2982	0.0995	24.8208	21.93	0.2391	33.56	33.5600	-

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7502	0.3770	3.6403	0.3054	3.6728	1518.00	3.4180
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	5.2894	0.5317	5.1344	0.4307	5.1803	2141.04	4.8209
Saudi Riyal	0.2667	0.1891	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0814	0.98	404.78	0.9114
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8807	9.9480	-	9.66	0.8101	9.74	4026.74	9.0668
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1948	1.0302	1.0302	-	0.0839	1.01	417.00	0.9389
Kuwait Dinar	3.2744	2.3215	12.2795	1.2344	11.82	-	12.03	4970.63	0.9389
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0211	0.1026	0.9912	0.0832	-	413.31	0.9306
Lebanese/1000	0.66	0.4671	2.4706	0.2483	2.3981	0.2012	2.4195	-	2.2516
Egyptian	0.2926	0.2074	1.0972	0.1103	1.0650	0.0894	1.0745	444.12	-

Energy

Oils	Last	revious
Brent	14.20	14.21
W. Texas	15.60	15.86
Bonny	14.20	14.21
Dubai	12.73	12.58
UL Gas	156.00	155.00

Mid-East Currencies

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2667	0.4782	0.1596	0.39828	35.1902
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.48828	0.16296	0.40654	35.9312
KW Dinar	3.2744	5.87199	1.95963	4.88998	432.152
BH Dinar	0.3770	4.75737	1.58755	3.9604	350.018
CY Pound	1.8975	3.4043	1.136	2.8344	250.434

Metal Prices

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz's)	309.5	310
Silver (oz's)	6.18	6.22
Platinum (oz's)	403	405
AL (3 Months)	1469	1471
CU (3 Months)	1878	1882
Zinc (3 Months)	1113	1115
Lead (3 Months)	566	568
NI (3 Months)	5585	5595

Libor Fixing

Period C'ncy	-1- Month	-3- Months	-6- Months	-1- Year
USD	5.6875	5.7656	5.8672	6.0234
GBP	7.4218	7.4792	7.4531	7.4323
JPY	0.6354	0.7083	0.7500	0.7708
DEM	3.6561	3.7562	3.8563	4.0374
FRF	3.5313	1.6250	1.7578	1.9453
CHF	1.5000	3.6211	3.7324	3.9512
ITL	5.4290	5.1400	4.8460	-

Main Equity indices

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls
NewYork	DOW JONES	8932.84	33.88	0.38	8954.01	8899.21	8898.96
Newyork	S&P 500	1089.43	4.32	0.4	1091.21	1084.58	1085.11
London	FT-SE 100	5794	-12.6	-0.22	5838.7	5774.4	5806.8
Tokyo	NIKKIE 225	15395.43	-254.52	-1.63	15625.4	15334.5	15650
Paris	CAC 40	3733.93	-43.3	-1.15	3780.25	3709.37	3777.23
Frankfurt	DAX	5108.48	89.61	1.79	5154.88	5086.84	5018.67

Energy

Commodity	Last	Delivery
Coffee (c/lbs)	139.68	Spot
Cocoa ($/ton)	1989	Spot
Sugar ($/ton)	250.2	Spot
Wheat ($/ton)	61	Spot
Soya (c/lbs)	28.42	Spot
Tea (stg/kg)	140	Spot
Barley ($/bsh)	0	Spot
Rice ($/ton)	410	Spot

*** JOD Cross Rates**

Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
GB Sterling	1.1781	1.184
DE Mark	0.3941	0.3961
CH Franc	0.4736	0.476
FR Franc	0.1176	0.1182
JP Yen	0.5348	0.5378
NL Guilder	0.3504	0.3522
IT Lira	0.399	0.401

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 29/04/1998

	PAST 12 HOUNTHS HIGH	LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE
	355.500	251.000	ARAB BANK	14.3	1.14	23	2940	1026410	350.00	350.00	-
	2.340	1.660	JOR.NATIONAL BK.	14.1	4.05	19	108500	184456	1.68	1.73	.05+
S	3.540	1.250	BANK OF JORDAN	4.2	0.00	1	150	201	1.34	1.34	-
	1.300	.890	MID.EAST INV.BK.	60.4	0.00	1	150	138	.95	.92	.03-
+S	2.680	1.610	INDUSTRIAL DEV.BK.	6.2	8.61	3	1737	2781	1.61	1.60	.01-
T	5.990	4.660	THE HOUSING BK.	19.1	3.32	37	20000	120044	5.89	6.03	.14+
S	4.180	1.790	JOR.KUWAIT BANK	.9	0.00	4	1290	2352	1.82	1.83	.01+
	.920	.590	JOR.GULF BANK	4.0	10.45	2	1500	1005	.67	.67	-
S	4.020	1.750	JOR.ISLAMIC BANK	15.5	0.00	10	2707	4962	1.83	1.83	-
	1.400	.800	BEIT.AL-MAL (REITNA[	4.0	0.00	1	150	123	.81	.82	.01+
	BANK SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 245.65	%CHG: +0.42		105	139284	1342863			
S	1.350	.900	ARABIAN SEAS INSUR.	54.9	0.00	1	250	250	1.00	1.00	-
	INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 121.64	%CHG: 0.00		2	267	284			
	2.240	1.550	JOR.ELECTRIC PWR.	10.3	5.21	23	9113	19203	2.10	2.11	.01+
	5.500	2.450	HIMEH MINERALS	51.9	0.00	3	7114	33720	4.51	4.74	.23+
	1.550	.970	NATL. PORTFOLIO	41.1	0.00	10	4900	5047	1.03	1.03	-
	.590	.360	JORDAN INTL.TRAD.	g	0.00	3	1300	468	.37	.36	.01-
+	1.480	1.120	MID. EAST HOTELS	F	0.00	1	1500	1665	1.14	1.11	.03-
	4.600	2.890	ARAB INTL.INV.EDUC.	9.9	2.00	2	700	2800	4.05	4.00	.05-
	1.090	.900	ZARKA EDUCATION	16.2	0.00	1	1500	1380	.93	.92	.01-
	1.830	1.450	UNIFIED CO.	6.7	7.24	17	6700	10106	1.50	1.52	.02+
	SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 115.96	%CHG: -0.25		60	32827	74389			
+	4.450	2.600	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	14.8	4.40	16	5637	14698	2.60	2.50	.10-
	11.250	9.200	JOR. PETROL.REFINARY	10.7	8.08	14	8382	92036	11.05	11.00	.05-
T	1.460	1.040	WOOLEN INDUSTRIES	11.7	6.80	3	150	220	1.45	1.47	.02+
	3.400	2.220	ARAB ALUM. IND.	20.6	8.99	3	97	268	2.80	2.78	.02-
	.570	.400	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	16.2	0.00	2	90	42	.48	.48	-
	1.110	.670	ARAB PAPER CONV.TRD.	22.3	0.00	1	1500	1095	.76	.73	.03-
	.620	.510	NATIONAL INDS.	g	0.00	3	1523	822	.54	.54	-
	.760	.370	INTERMED.PETRO.CHEM.	g	0.00	3	1650	646	.40	.40	-
S	3.000	.920	NATL.CABLE WIRE.MFAC	27.2	0.00	9	5400	6093	1.14	1.13	.01-
	.730	.530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM	11.4	0.00	4	1250	750	.60	.60	-
	1.560	1.150	ARAB PHARM.CHEM.	14.7	4.51	10	6091	8115	1.35	1.33	.02-
S	1.540	.810	UNIV. MODN.INDS.	13.6	7.06	24	7800	6633	.86	.85	.01-
	1.200	.680	JOR.INDS.RESOURCES	9.3	14.49	4	1750	1191	.68	.69	.01+
	1.620	1.350	NATL. CHLORINE	9.5	7.41	2	1000	1350	1.40	1.35	.05-
	1.080	.810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	12.3	11.49	12	8050	7004	.87	.87	-
	1.790	1.290	EL -ZAY READY WEAR	47.9	0.00	9	4700	6392	1.37	1.36	.01-
	1.310	1.080	INTL. TOBACCO	7.3	5.60	13	19300	23755	1.23	1.25	.02+
	1.220	.860	UNION CH. & VEG.	11.1	0.00	12	15800	17621	1.10	1.11	.01+
	.860	.660	JORDAN STEEL	8.3	9.46	5	7100	5254	.74	.74	-
	.700	.570	MID.EAST COMPLEX	10.7	0.00	8	13350	7877	.60	.59	.01-
	INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS		INDEX: 106.77	%CHG: -0.65		160	110865	201996			
	GRAND TOTAL		INDEX: 170.32	%CHG: +0.03		327	283243	1619532			

PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 29/04/1998

N	1.050	.910	EXPORT & FIN.BNK.75%	17.0	0.00	6	10000	6763	.92	.92	-
	.530	.340	JOR.TRADE FAC.	g	0.00	3	14500	5945	.41	.41	-
	.620	.360	ARAB FIN.INVEST.	g	0.00	3	22000	9020	.42	.41	.01-
	1.010	.720	AL-SHARQ INV.CO.	F	0.00	4	25000	25000	1.00	1.00	-
	.780	.610	AL-DAWLIYAH	38.0	0.00	5	3300	2153	.66	.65	.01-
N	2.220	1.050	CENTURY INV. GROUP	g	0.00	1	250	405	1.71	1.62	.09-
	1.000	.650	ARAB JOR.INVEST.CO.	17.0	5.00	2	1000	963	.95	1.00	.05+
+	.600	.570	UNIVL. METALS	g	0.00	1	100	54	.57	.54	.03-
	.470	.240	ARAB INTL.INV.TRD.	39.2	0.00	4	15000	5120	.36	.34	.02-
	.650	.360	NATL.MULT.ENG.MANUCO	g	0.00	11	40250	14893	.37	.37	-
	.690	.580	MIDEAST PHARM. 90%	E	0.00	7	1850	925	.61	.60	.01-
	.730	.560	RAZI PHARM.	E	0.00	1	7000	4830	.69	.69	-
N	.950	.550	ADVANCED PHARMA.IND.	g	0.00	6	9500	5965	.64	.63	.01-
	.710	.430	NATL. POULTRY	g	0.00	46	82944	46577	.54	.57	.03+
N	.950	.470	OPTICALS HEARING 75%	E	0.00	2	3000	1000	.58	.56	-
N	1.000	.750	EKBAL PRINT CO. 75%	12.5	9.24	7	6800	3877	.83	.62	.01-
	GRAND TOTAL					109	242494	133509			

T : New 12 months high
+ : New 12 months low
6 : Stock dividend during the past 12 months
N : Listed during the past 12 months
P : P/E ratio is 100 or more
g : Negative P/E
E : Earning is zero or N/A for the most recent year

JORDAN MARKETPLACE *** JORDAN MARKETPLACE *** JORDAN MARKETPLACE

DAJANI JEWELLERS. "A Symphony of Style" Amra Forum Hotel Amman - Cairo - Rio Phone 5527118

Many villas and apartments for rent and sale
Furnished & Unfurnished
For more information call:
Abdoun Real Estate
5920605/5920609/079-30007
E-mail address
abdoun@go.com.jo

STUDIO HAIG
Professional quality in 1 hour service
Develop your colour film at our shop and get:
* JUMBO photo size 30% larger.
* Free enlargement 20 x 30 cm.
Shmeisani - Opposite Grindlays Bank.
Phone: 5604042
Swelfieh Tel: 822891

DIPLOMAT Rent a Car
Call Us Now
5510427 / 8-9

TO ADVERTISE IN THIS SECTION CALL
5667171 EXT. 223
OR
5684311 - 5699634 EXT. 42

Your Address In Amman
CRYSTAL
Quality Serviced Suites
One & Two Bedrooms Fully Equipped Kitchenettes Daily & Long Stay Reasonable Rates
5th Circle
Tel.: 5692672-Fax 5674551
e-mail: CRYSTAL@go.com.jo

L'olivier French Cuisine
L'olivier Restaurant
Abdoun 5929564

TO ADVERTISE IN THIS SECTION CALL
5667171 EXT. 223
OR
5684311 - 5699634 EXT. 42

Bluebird Tours
Provides:
Complete services for foreign visitors transportation in A/C car - bus multilingual drivers escort - sightseeing
For more information please call 5684734
E-mail:
bluebird@go.com.jo

Premier League

Clubs discuss JFA proposal before 3rd week begins Friday

By Aleen Bannayan
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The third week of the Premier League Championship is scheduled to start Friday unless seven of the ten teams who meet today decide to boycott the competiton which kicked off April 20.

Except for Al Wihdat, Shahab Al Hussein and Al Jazireh, the remaining cluhs sent the Jordan Foothall Association (JFA) a memorandum requesting a change in the formula of revenue from ticket sales allocation.

The JFA hopes to resolve the issue this week before the clubs proceed with their threat of pulling out of the competition unless their demands are met.

Ten matches of the prestigious soccer competition — the second of four titles up for grahs this year — are already over with last year's third placed Al Hussein the biggest upset loser 1-0 to Al Jazireh and 3-0 to Al Faisali.

Al Faisali beat Al Ramtha 3-1.

In the upcoming week, Al Ahli face Al Faisali Friday and Al Ramtha face Irbid rivals Al Hussein Saturday in the most heated of the five matches.

Titleholders Al Wihdat lead the standings after 3-0 win over Al Arahi and 4-2 win over Shahab Al Hussein.

Al Wihdat took the first of the year's titles when they won the season-opening Cup Winners' Cup after a 4-2 win over Al Ramtha.

It was Al Wihdat's fourth Cup Winners' Cup trophy after winning in 1989, 1992 and 1997. The match traditionally groups the Premier League and Jordan Cup champioos of the preceding year.

Since Al Wibdat won the 1997 Premier League and Jordan Cup titles, their opponents were Jordan Cup runners-up Al Ramtha whose last major title was the 1996 Federation Shield.

Al Wihdat are this year looking for their 5th consecutive Premier League title, having also won the Jordan Cup and Cup Winners Cup in the past two years.

The Jordan Cup is scheduled for mid-June and will group 40 teams representing the Premier League as well as the first and second divisions.

The competition will be held on a knockout basis with most of the Premier League teams having first round hyes

The fourth major event of the season will be the Federation Shield, grouping the Premier League only and also played on a knockout hasis in mid-July.

STANDINGS AFTER 2ND WEEK

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Wihdat	2	2	-	-	7	2	6
Faisali	2	2	-	-	6	1	6
Jazireh	2	1	1	-	1	-	4
Qadissieh	2	-	2	-	2	2	2
Kufrsoum	2	-	2	-	1	1	2
Ahli	2	-	2	-	-	-	2
S. Al Hussein	2	-	1	1	3	5	1
Ramtha	2	-	1	1	2	4	1
Arahi	2	-	1	1	1	4	1
Hussein	2	-	-	2	-	4	-

Agassi beats Woodbridge to advance

MUNICH (AFP) — Andre Agassi braved wintry temperatures on Tuesday to maintain his perfect record over Todd Woodbridge with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 battling win into the second round of the $525,000 BMW Open.

Agassi, who grew up in the sweltering desert town of Las Vegas, ignored the chilly German weather as he carved out the victory, his second on clay this spring, in one hour, 33 minutes.

The match, which did not end, until nearly 7 p.m., meant that Briton Greg Rusedski did not get on court.

Due to fading light, the top seed's first-round contest against German Oliver Gross was put off until midday on Wednesday.

Agassi lost his first career set to Woodbridge, hut pulled together in the third to advance.

"It was tough out there today," said the American, wbo received advice from Brad Gilbert as part of an ATP Tour experiment with on-court coaching.

"After the first set we felt I was only keeping the ball in play, just getting the joh done. In the second set he stepped it up and I wasn't prepared.

"I had to raise my game and hit the big shots to win in the third."

After an effortless first set, the going got tougher. Agassi lost serve for 1-2 hut immediately hroke back.

But a loose backhand return to lose the seventh game put the American into trouhle again, 3-4 in the late afternoon with the light starting to fade.

Woodhridge increased the pressure a notch and hroke through to win the first set out of 11 he has played against Agassi, forcing the matcb into a final set which he took easily enough 6-3.

The win was eighth-seeded Agassi's fifth against his Australian opponent.

Agassi is playing Munich for the first time as he makes a determined effort to prepare suitably for the Frencb Open, where he reacbed the final in 1990 and 1991.

His comehack whicb hegan late last year as he sunk into the ranking 140s bas already paid dividends, giving the former World No. 1 a ranking of 20th this week on the ATP Tour list, his best since March, 1997.

Andre Agassi

"My clay form just keeps getting better and better, that's all to the good," said Agassi. "But I need more matches."

Agassi's next opponent will be German Rainer Schuttler, who upset Woodhridge's doubles partner Mark Woodforde 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to advance into the second round.

German hope Tommy Haas meanwhile faced near-certain defeat standing a set and 1-4 down to Swiss Marc Rosset in their first-ever meeting.

But the 33rd-ranked Haas from Hamhurg pulled through to level at a set each after saving four match points and then forced a tiebreaker against the unseeded former Olympic champion from Geneva.

Haas continued his challenge in the third set hut was unahle to complete the victory as Rosset hung onto an early hreak to earn a 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4 win.

The 1997 Munich semi-finalist next plays seventh seed Thomas Enqvist of Sweden, who ousted compatriot Magnus Norman 7-5, 6-3 in a repeat of a win at Stockholm last November.

Second seed Jonas Bjorkman joined Enqvist as a Swedisb winner on a day when it felt more like northern Scandinavia than southern Baveria at the end of April.

World No. 4 Bjorkman continued to show steady improvement after fighting off a virus which has plagued him for nearly two months and which had limited him to a single victory (at the Lipton Championships) during his past five tournaments on the ATP Tour.

The Swede moved into the second round at the Iphitos club with a fightback, 2-6, 6-4, 6-0 over Andre Medvedev of the Ukraine.

Bjorkman wore a t-shirt and jumper while Medvedev played in long sweatpants as spring weather turned wet and wintery after a mild start to the week.

Bjorkman next plays Belgian Christophe Van Garsse, wbo beat Brett Steven of New Zealand 7-5, 6-1.

Galo Blanco made a successful Munich dehut with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) upset, sending out sixth-seeded fellow Spaniard Sergi Bruguera, a two-time French Open holder.

Sonics on verge of elimination

MINNEAPOLIS (AFP) — Seattle stumhled to the brink of elimination from the National Basketball Association playoffs here Tuesday while Portland and Atlanta kept alive their cbampionship bopes.

Kevin Garnett scored 19 points and Stephon Marhury added 14 points and 11 rebounds to spark Minnesota past the Supersonics 98-90, giving the Timberwolves a 2-1 edge over the Western Conference's number two seed.

Minnesota can close out the best-of-five series here Thursday.

"I'm not surprised. We have always been a confident team," Garnett said. "Now their hacks are against the wall. The next game is do or die."

The Los Angeles Lakers and Charlotte Hornets missed chances to sweep their first round matcbups. The Lakers lost 99-94 at Portland while the Hornets matched an NBA scoring futility mark in a 96-64 loss at Atlanta.

"We didn't execute well at all," Cbarlotte scoring leader Glen Rice said. "That's why it was such a lopsided score."

Miami beat New York 91-85 to grab a 2-1 edge and reclaim a home-court edge from the Knicks. That leaves the seventh-seeded Timberwolves as the team in the best position to pull a first-round upset.

"We're showing a lot of guts and a lot of character," Marhury said. "We lost our concentration hut we came hack. We are coming out and performing like we have to to win."

Anthony Peeler and Sam Mitchell eacb had playoff career highs with 20 and 19 points respectively for Minnesota.

Gary Payton scored 26 points while Vin Baker bad 17 points and 12 rebounds for Seattle, which fell behind 2-1 in last year's first round before rallying to eliminate Phoenix.

The Lakers squandered 36 points and 16 rebounds from Shaquille O'Neal while Portland's Damon Stoudamire and Isiah Rider each scored 18 points as the Trail Blazers try to avoid a fifth consecutive first round ouster.

Charlotte Hornets Bobby Phills (L) and Atlanta Hawks Steve Smith scramble for a loose ball in the first quarter of their NBA playoff game. Charlotte leads the best-of-five series 2-0 (Reuters photo)

"There are more miracles to come," Rider said. "We're happy, but not overly happy. They were flatlined and we were fired up. Home court means a lot for us. Miracles can happen in our life. You never know."

The Lakers had checked out of their hotel, confident of the sweep, but Stoudamire sparked Portland in the fourth quarter. "That's what I call 'Damon time,'" he said.

At Atlanta, the Hawks matched the best defensive effort in NBA playoff history to avoid being swept, pulling within 2-1 in their first round series. The Hawks try to equalize at home on Thursday.

The Hawks posted their most lopsided playoff triumph in history and equaled a playoff record for fewest points allowed, matching the 64 Miami held Orlando to last year and Utah kept Portland to 64 in 1996.

Until the debacle, the Hornets bad never scored fewer than 80 points in a playoff game and bad been limited to no less than 71 this season. Rice managed only eight points after averaging 29 the past two games.

"We knew the only way to win this baskethall game was to play defensively hard," said Dikembe Mutombo, who had 10 points and 11 rebounds. "Every time they were driving we douhle-teamed them very well."

Mookie Blaylock scored 16 points to lead six douhle-digit scorers for the Hawks, who swept four regular season games from Cbarlotte by an average of 17 points but lost the first two on the Hornets' bome court.

Blaylock missed 10 of 12 shots in a game two loss but was 6-for-6 in scoring 14 first-half points as Atlanta built a 51-32 galf-time edge.

Anthony Mason led Charlotte with 12 points while Vlade Divac added 11.

"We have to learn from this game," Divac said. "I would rather lose by 50 than by one because it makes you think about it. Now you know they're good. You have to prepare yourself mentally. It hurts your pride."

Miami's Voshon Lenard scored 28 points and the Heat claimed only its fourth triumph ever at Madison Square Garden. The Knicks try to equalize at home Thursday.

Tim Hardaway scored 27 for Miami while Allan Houstoo had 27 for the Knicks, hut 18 of those came in the first quarter and none came in the fourth when the Knicks needed them most.

"With Allan Houston, we try to limit his shots," Lenard said. "We threw a couple of guys at him, tried to wear on him as much as possihle. Toward the end of the game, he got a little tired. We tried to work him."

Larry Johnson added 22 for the Knicks, who are on the brink of a first-round ouster for the first time since 1991.

Miami's Eric Murdock pulled his finger across his throat after a basket in the same cutting fashion that Knicks guard Chris Childs did in game two, an insult that lingered with Miami's Hardaway.

"This up bere got right under my damn skin. I think we took that very personally. I think Eric Murdock did that tonight and we got on him for doing that. You just don't do that. You don't do that."

"I think I got myself in some trouble," Murdock said. "I really shouldn't have did it. I was caught in the emotions. I did it, but I apologize for it."

Reigning champion Chicago could sweep into the second rouod with a victory at New Jersey on Wednesday.

San Antonio could also advance hy beating Phoenix at home while Utah, which matched the Bulls for the best regular-season mark, visits Houstoo with that series level at 1-1.

Jordan focuses on title as rumors swirl

CHICAGO (AFP) — Michael Jordan ignores the latest stories about future changes for the Chicago Bulls and concentrates on bringing the club its sixth National Basketball Association crown in eight years.

"We never know when the next curveball is coming," Jordan said. "But we know we have to go out and play the game. That's where our focus should be.

"We're mature adults and we know how to deal with things we really can't control. We just push it aside."

The latest reports have Iowa State University coach Tim Floyd, a pal of Bulls general manager Jerry Krause, taking over the club next season in place of coach Phil Jackson.

Jordan has said he will play for no coach other than Jackson. So with club and Floyd denying things, Jordan goes about his husiness knowing the dynasty days might be done no matter what he does on the court.

"It hasn't happened yet so I'm not thinking about it," Jordan said. "I'm playing for Phil and finishing out the year."

The question of Jordan's future has not been decided and will not be until the playoff run is over. Jordan finds the interest in whether or not he will return "amazing" even as he admits this is likely "the last dance" for the Bulls' current lineup.

"I can concentrate on the games on the court because when I'm out there it's like a little bit of heaven for me. Everything else is put aside in my mind and the game is the thing."

Jordan is going out in style after his 10th NBA scoring title. He scored 39 and 32 points in Chicago's opening two playoff victories over New Jersey here. The Bulls can complete a sweep on the road Wednesday.

Jordan has the highest career scoring average in NBA history at 31.5 points a game and is the only player to average more than 30 points a game in the playoffs, with 25 post-season games the minimum to consider.

"This is the real fun time," Jordan said of the playoffs. "It's the apex of the season, fighting so hard to get to this point. It's one last struggle to do wbat you bave prepared yourself all season to do."

Jordan was the NBA Finals MVP for Chicago's title runs in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1997. It has been eight years since he played a full season and did not win the NBA title. But he is far from complacent.

"It's still nerve wracking for me," Jordan said.

"I still think we're the best team in the league. I think we have the best chance to win the championship again. I wouldn't want to go into the playoffs with anything less than those thoughts."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAH HIRSCH

©1998 Tribune Media Services, Inc.

WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠K Q 10 4 ♡K 10 9 8 ◇9 8 7 4 ♣8

Partner opens the bidding with one club. What do you respond?

Q. 2 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

♠A Q 3 ♡5 4 3 ◇Q 10 ♣J 10 8 3 2

The bidding has proceeded:

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♣	1♠	?	

What do you bid now?

Q. 3 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠A Q J 6 ♡K 10 7 5 4 ◇A Q ♣A 10

What is your opening bid?

Q. 4 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠8 7 6 3 2 ♡7 2 ◇A 7 6 2 ♣6 3

The bidding has proceeded:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1♠	Pass	?

What action do you take?

Q. 5 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:

♠10 7 6 3 ♡J 9 6 4 2 ◇A 6 ♣K 5

The bidding has proceeded:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1◇	Dbl	1NT	?

What action do you take?

Q. 6 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠Q 10 ♡9 7 8 ◇K Q J 8 4 2 ♣4

Partner opens the bidding with one no trump. What do you respond?

TODAY AT

CINEMA TEL:4634144
PHILADELPHIA '1'
CRYING FREEMAN
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:4634144
PHILADELPHIA '2'
Yusra & Ilham Shahin ... in
DANTELLA (ARABIC)
Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:5699238
PLAZA
The biggest cinema production
TITANIC
Shows: 12:00, 3:00, 7:00, 10:30 p.m.

CINEMA TEL:5677420
CONCORD
CONCORD "1"
Kim Basinger ... in
L.A CONFIDENTIAL
Shows: 12:30, 3:00, 6:30, 8:15, 10:45
CONCORD "2"
ISMAILIA RAYEH GAI - KAMANANA
Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL: 5934793
GALLERIA 2
ABDOUN
TITANIC & One of Walt Disneys best movies
FLUBBER

CINEMA TEL: 5934793
GALLERIA 1
ABDOUN
GRAND OPENING
TITANIC & SCREAM 2

Hisham Yanes Theatre
TEL: 4625155
STARTING APRIL 6TH
Don't Laugh Please We're Jordanian
Starring Hisham Yanes, Amal Dabbas, Rania Kurdi and the group
at 8:30 p.m.
For reservations call: 4640155, 4625155

Sports

Heated con in RACJ

By Roufan Nabhas
Special to the Jordan Ti

AMMAN — The third round of Speed Test kicks off Friday at track of the Royal Automobile Jordan (RACJ)

Champion Ghanth Bilbeisi at the first and the second rounds, tough competition from several participants

The Shadian brothers, Khalil Barkey who took second and third on April 24 will try to overtake Bilbeisi for first place.

Meanwhile, Yasser Jarrar who first round with a spin of a Bilbeisi will try to regain his position which dropped to second round

Jarrar was given a ten-second by the organising committee in

Irish swimm

SYDNEY (AFP) — Triple Olympic gold medallist Michelle De Bruin of Ireland could be banned for life if found guilty of tampering with a doping sample

Gunnar Werner, general secretary of swimming's governing body FINA, said Wednesday the 28-year-old De Bruin had manipulated the sample of a random test in January

He would not say what he meant exactly but said there were no illegal drugs found in the test.

Athletes who have been found guilty of tampering with urine samples in the past either supplied someone else's urine or their own urine they had stored in a fridge, when they were clean of drugs. No swimmer has ever been found guilty of tampering with a test sample.

"It's an open invitation for manipulation, so it's up to the FINA doping panel to decide. It could be from zero to life," Werner said.

She can ask for a B sample to be tested and if she fails, it depends on what happens to that B sample.

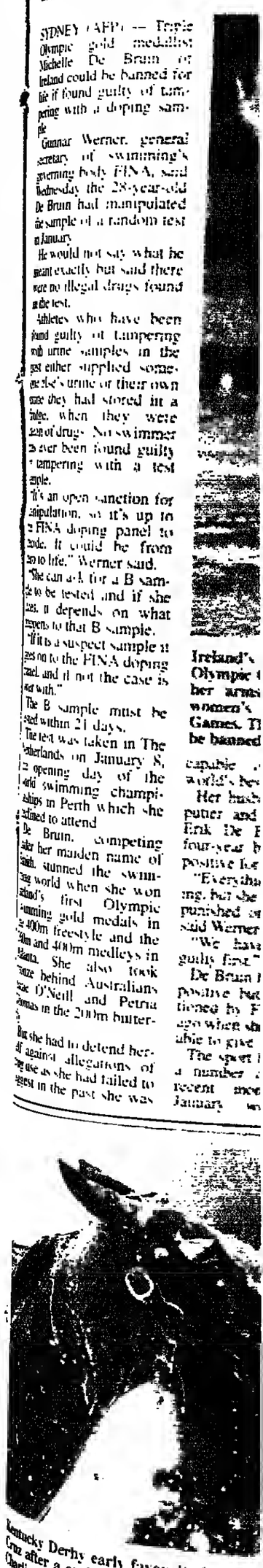
"If it is a suspect sample it goes on to the FINA doping panel and if not the case is over with."

The B sample must be tested within 21 days.

The test was taken in The Netherlands on January 8, the opening day of the world swimming championships in Perth which she declined to attend

De Bruin, competing under her maiden name of Smith, stunned the swimming world when she won Ireland's first Olympic swimming gold medals in the 400m freestyle and the 200m and 400m medleys in Atlanta. She also took bronze behind Australians Susie O'Neill and Petria Thomas in the 200m butterfly.

But she had to defend herself against allegations of doping use as she had failed to register in the past she was



Ireland's Olympic ... her arms ... women's ... Games. T... be banned ... capable ... world's be... Her hus... partner and ... Erik De ... four-year b... positive te... "Everyth... ing, but she ... punished ... said Werner ... "We have ... guilty first." De Bruin ... positive but ... licence by F... ago when sh... able to give ... The sport ... a number ... recent mo... January ...

Kentucky Derby early favourite Indian C... Cruz after a early morning work out at ... Charlie is one of two horses trained by Bo... running of the Kentucky Derby set for M...

JORDAN T... jotime...

Heated competition expected in RACJ's 3rd speed test

By Roufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN— The third round of the Pepsi Speed Test kicks off Friday at the race track of the Royal Automobile Club of Jordan (RACJ).

Champion Ghaith Bilbeisi, who won the first and the second rounds, will face tough competitioo from several other participants.

The Shadian brothers, Khatchik and Barkev who took second and third places on April 24 will try to compete with Bilbeisi for first place.

Meanwhile, Yasser Jarrar who lost the first round with a split of a second to Bilbeisi will try to regain his advanced position which dropped to eighth in the second round.

Jarrar was given a ten-second penalty hy the organising committee in the second round after arriving late at the RACJ.

The event will again miss the feminine touch. The only woman driver to eompete in the second round was Abeer Batikhi. Maya Al Mufti who is taking part in Rally du Liban and Tala Al Shawa are again absent.

As usual the track will not be revealed to the drivers until Thursday when they are allowed to check the track on foot before Friday's event.

Meanwhile, RACJ is preparing for the May 14-15 Jordan International Rally, considered one of the most important rallies in the Middle East.

Thirty drivers from around the world are expected to take part in the event.

Famous names such as United Arab Emirates' Mohammad Bin Sulayem, Saudi Arabia's Abdulah Bakhashab and Cyprus' Andreas Tsolouftas will be competing in the event.

Irish swimmer faces life ban

SYDNEY (AFP) — Triple Olympic gold medallist Michelle De Bruin of Ireland could be banned for life if found guilty of tampering with a doping sample.

Gunnar Werner, general secretary of swimming's governing body FINA, said Wednesday the 28-year-old De Bruin had manipulated the sample of a random test in January.

He would not say what he meant exactly hut said there were no illegal drugs fouod in the test.

Athletes who have been found guilty of tampering with urine samples in the past either supplied someone else's urine or their own urine they had stored in a fridge, wben they were clean of drugs. No swimmer has ever been found guilty of tampering with a test sample.

"It's an open sanction for mahipulation, so it's up to the FINA doping panel to decide. It could be from zero to life," Werner said.

"She can ask for a B sample to be tested and if she does, it depends on what happens to that B sample.

"If it is a suspect sample it goes oo to the FINA doping panel, and if not the case is over with."

The B sample must be tested within 21 days.

The test was taken in The Netherlands oo January 8, the opening day of the world swimmiog championships in Perth which she declined to attend.

De Bruin, competing under her maiden name of Smith, stunned the swimming world when she won Ireland's first Olympic swimming gold medals in the 400m freestyle and the 200m and 400m medleys in Atlanta. She also took bronze behind Australians Susie O'Neill and Petria Thomas in the 200m hutterfly.

But she had to defend herself against allegations of drug use as she had failed to suggest in the past she was capable of beating the world's best.

Ireland's Michelle de Bruin, who competed at the 1996 Olympic Games under her maiden name Smith, raises her arms in jubilation after winning gold in the women's 200 individual medley at the 1996 Atlanta Games. The triple Olympic swimming champiou could be banned for life (Reuters photo)

Her husband, Dutch shot putter and discus thrower Erik De Bruin, served a four-year ban after testing posiove for testosterone.

"Everything is disappointing, but she has not yet been punished or found guilty," said Werner.

"We have to find her guilty first."

De Bruin has never tested positive hut she was cautioned by FINA two years ago when she was not available to give a random test.

The sport has been hit hy a number of scandals in recent months. At the January world championships in Perth four Chinese swimmers tested positive for a banned diuretic which the International Olympic Committee this week officially condemned as a masking agent for steroids.

However FINA have lifted their suspensions pending further investigations into Chinese claims they were only guilty of using a herbal medicine.

Chinese breaststroker Yuan Yuan and her coach Zhou Zhewen also received lengthy bans for the discovery of human growth hormones in Yuan's luggage on her arrival in Australia.

Kentucky Derby early favourite Indian Charlie is washed down by groom Jose Cruz after a early morning work out at Churchill Downs in Louisville. Indian Charlie is one of two horses trained by Bob Baffert that are running in the 124th running of the Kentucky Derby set for May 2 (Reuters photo)

JORDAN TIMES E-MAIL

Capriati back in business

HAMBURG (AFP) — Jennifer Capriati produced an upset victory over Florencia Labat, and sixth seed Sabine Appelmans of Belgium was tumbled out by Russia's Elena Likhovtseva on the opening day of the Intersport Ladies Grand Prix here Tuesday.

Capriaó, now ranked 227 and playing just her fourth event of the year, humbled 34th-ranked Lahat 6-2, 6-4 in 67 minutes with a composed performance that demonstrated she has added a very able backhand and fine footwork to her familiar forehand skills.

Capriati immediately placed her Argentinian opponent under pressure, gaining three break points in the opening game, and from 1-2 she reeled off eight straight games to win the first set and lead 3-0 in the second.

"I'm proud of myself, especially at the end staying tough and not letting it go to a third set, closing it out when I did," said Capriati.

Capriati's two recent victories io Amelia Island, Florida, boosted her confidence, and she was determined to keep the momentum going.

Appelmans was beateo 6-0, 3-6, 6-3, and admitted she had found difficulty in transferring to clay from her recent Fed Cup matches on hard courts.

"It was my first match on clay and I hadn't even practised on it," Appelmans revealed. "In the second set I felt the ball better and she made some mistakes, and in the third set I wanted to do certain things and they never worked. She was running very well and running to the corners, and every time I came to the net she passed me. Every time."

Fellow Belgian Dominque Van Roost has also passed Appelmans, in the rankings, hut that is something she has taken in her stride.

"She's been playing unbelievably well," Appelmans conceded, "but she has her career and I have mine. In Belgium they started making comparisons between us and it would have been frustrating if my ranking had dropped a lot."

Sampras wins 1st match since getting back to No. 1

ATLANTA (AFP) — Pete Sampras won his first match since reclaiming his status as world tennis number one, beating fellow American Alex O'Brien at the ATP Challenge here Tuesday.

Sampras won 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), in a first-round match at the $315,000 clay court event, a tuneup for the only major championship Sampras has oot captured, the French Opeo.

Chile's Marcelo Rios ended a 102-week reign hy Sampras after winning at Key Biscayne last month but has been sidelined with an injury to allow Sampras to reclaim the top spot.

Third-seeded American Jim Courier was upset by Brazil's Marcio Carlsson 6-3, 2-6, 6-4, in another night match.

First Division Basketball Championship

Ahli, Orthodoxi meet Friday

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — All-time rivals Al Ahli and Al Orthodoxi play Friday with only one more match remaining before this year's First Division Basketball Championship concludes May 5.

Al Ahli, who ended Al Orthodoxi's 1976-1989 undisputed reign, were champions in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994 aided by the signing of Naser Bushnaq.

This year however, they are down to third after being in the runner up spot last season when Al Jazireh ended a 30-year drought to win the title.

Al Orthodoxi won in 1991, 1995 and 1996 and provided they beat Al Ahli Friday and Al Jazireh in the final match they will regain the title they held onto for the longest time.

Al Jazireh who beat Al Ahli 57-43 in the second playoff match to temporarily top the standings need to beat Al Orthodoxi by any score to retain the title.

Al Jazireh's have so far managed only one win over Al Orthodoxi 92-84 in the preliminary round. Their only two defeats this season were to Al Orthodoxi 73-69 in the preliminaries and 65-61 in the first playoff match.

They beat Al Ahli twice 75-69, and 57-53, and 78-63 in the first leg playoff match.

Al Orthodoxi beat Al Ahli 74-49 and 69-37 in the preliminaries and 84-61 in the first playoff match.

Al Ahli's poor physical condioning and incomplete bench coupled with ill-effects of inadequate pre-season training has led to an inconsistent form that forced them to rely on the individual efforts of Faisal Nsour and Yousef Zaghloul.

Al Orthodoxi are therefore the favourites in Friday's match having a more complete lineup of substitutes, compared to the depleted bench of their opponents with Mohammad Shamali and Marwan Ma'touq both nursing injuries, and centre Ramez Hammoudeh quitting the team for personal reasons.

PLAYOFF STANDINGS

Team	P	W	L	Sf	Sa	Pts
Jazireh	13	11	2	1086	753	24
Orthodoxi	12	11	1	986	660	23
Ahli	13	6	7	839	825	19

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Sydney turn down Nebiolo

SYDNEY (AFP) — Sydney Olympic organisers have rejected a claim from International Amateur Athletic Federation President Primo Nebiolo for free óckets and hotel bedrooms for officials."No we won't be able to give them free," Sydney Olympic Organising Committee President Michael Knight said Weónesday. Nebiolo, as president of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federaíons, put his hid in for free íckets and accommodation at the ASOIF meeting with the Execuóve Board of the Internaóonal Olympic Committee.

Salt Lake City waiting for women's call

SYDNEY (AFP) — Salt Lake City Olympics organisers are waiting to hear from the international federations what new women's sports they want to add to the 2002 Winter Games. "We are waiting to hear from the internaóonal federations before we can evaluate the proposals," Salt Lake City organisiog committee president Frank Joklik said here Wednesday. Bobsleigh, doubles luge and ski jumping are the women's events most likely to be added to the 2002 programme if the federatioos come up with a proposal. Womeo's hockey was introduced at the 1998 Nagano Winter Games. Joklik ruled out doubts that American brewer Anheuser Busch would be forced to withdraw as a sponsor because of local opposition. "Some Salt Lake City people did air their concerns but this sponsorship will not be dropped," he said.

55,000 World Cup tickets left

PARIS (AFP) — A total of 27 World Cup matches are sold out following the sale of another 14,000 tickets on Tuesday, organisers said. The organising committee said 55,000 tickets were still available and that 'phone lines to take further bookings would be open again Wednesday from 0600 to 1800 GMT. Organisers originally put 110,000 on telehone sale but added 60,000 more on Monday after several national federaóons returned those they were unable to sell. The first hatch were placed on sale hy phone last week but sold relaóvely slowly as the organisers were deluged with some 20 million calls from around Europe to just a handful of telecom operators.

WTA moves Open tuneup to New Haven

NEW HAVEN (AFP) — The WTA's U.S. Hardcourt Championships, the final tuneup event for the U.S. Open, will move here from Atlanta, the U.S. Tennis Association said Tuesday. The $450,000 women's event will be contested the week following an ATP Tour men's event on the same Connecticut Tennis Center courts. The tournament will run from August 24-29, ending two days before the US Open begins in New York. World number two and reigning Olympic champion Lindsay Davenport of the United States will come here to defend the crown she won last year in Atlanta at the 32-player event. "I'm excited about the move and I'm looking forward to playing in front of all the great teoois fans," she said. "This will be a great tune-up for the U.S. Open for me.

BritishBank Foundation Scholarship

The BritishBank Foundation is pleased to offer one scholarship for MA studies in Heritage Management at the Ironbridge Institute, University of Birmingham, during the 1998-99 academic year.

The Heritage Management course at the Ironbridge Institute starts on 29 September 1998 and is designed to train professionals with the skills required to identify a heritage resource, ensure that it is cared for, made accessible, and passed on to future generations. It is designed for people working in, or planning to work in, museums, historic properties or cultural landscapes.

The BritishBank Foundation is looking for a scholar with a record of excellence, either professional or academic, who will use his/her studies in the UK in the application of their work in Jordan. Priority is given to candidates with excellent command of English working in archaeology, planning, tourism or architecture. Candidates should, preferably, be under the age of 40.

Application forms along with detailed information on the scholarship, the Heritage Studies course at the Ironbridge Institute, as well as on completing the form can be collected from Manager Personal Banking, BritishBank, Jabal Hussein branch or the British Council, Jabal Amman, during the period 28 April - 11 May 1998. The deadline for receiving completed applications is 17 May 1998.

Any submitted documents cannot be reclaimed and must therefore be a photocopy and not an original.

Short listed candidates will be invited for an interview and the successful candidate advised by 10 June 1998.

BritishBank Foundation, Amman

Afghan factions take major step toward ending civil war

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Afghanistan's warring factions took a major step toward ending a two-decade long war that has devastated their homeland by agreeing Wednesday to a controversial commission of religious scholars.

The formation of the commission has been the critical issue at peace talks being held in neighbouring Pakistan, the first between the feuding sides in two years.

Both sides will appoint delegates to the commission and neither side will have the right to veto the other's delegates, said Ibrahim Bakr, the assistant secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and co-sponsor of the peace talks along with the United Nations.

This commission of ulema will rule the country in line with Sharia or Islamic law, Mr. Bakr told reporters during a break in negotiations. The members of the commission will interpret the Islamic law and both sides in the conflict have agreed to abide by their decision.

No date for the formation of this commission was announced.

The breakthrough came on the fourth consecutive day of talks, which were brokered by Washington's Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson.

For the first time since talks began in Islamabad on Sunday, the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Thomas Simons attended the negotiations.

It was unclear whether he played any role in the negotiations, but he had accompanied Richardson to Afghanistan on April 17 when the U.N. ambassador got the two sides to agree to peace negotiations.

"We have sacrificed a lot in this regard," said Abdul Hakim Mujahed, a negotiator on the Taleban army's team and the Taleban's ambassador to Pakistan. He didn't offer any details.

The Taleban army had been demanding that only religious scholars participate on the commission, while their northern-based opponents have been seeking a broader definition that would include scholars of other disciplines, as well as Islamic ideology.

It appeared that the co-sponsors of the talks sidestepped the issue of definition of religious scholar by getting both sides to agree not to veto the other's selection of delegates to the commission.

Negotiations in the Pakistani capital were expected to continue at least until Friday. Other agenda items, such as a cease fire and prisoner exchange, will be discussed, said Mr. Bakr.

The United Nations is hoping that the two sides will end this round of talks with a prolonged cease fire.

In the 85 per cent of Afghanistan ruled by the Taleban army, led by Islamic seminarians, a harsh form of Islamic law has been imposed.

Women no longer can work, schools for girls have been closed and men have to grow beards and wear a head covering.

Most Taleban soldiers belong to Afghanistan's majority Pashtun ethnic group and their opponents, belonging to the country's minorities, say their edicts reflect tribal traditions rather than Islamic law.

In the northern 15 per cent of Afghanistan where the Taleban's enemies rule, the laws are not so harsh, but the lawlessness in the area has made it impossible for international aid organisations to remain in Mazar-e-Sharif, the opposition stronghold.

A divided anti-Taleban alliance has been wracked by ferocious infighting, much of it between troops loyal to Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum and Shiite Muslims belonging to Hezb-e-Wahadat.

U.K. has limited goals for London talks — spokesman

LONDON (AFP) — A spokesman for British Premier Tony Blair warned Tuesday against expecting "diplomatic fireworks" at next month's London Middle East peace talks, stressing they were aimed at simply keeping the peace process alive.

"The objective is to keep the process going rather than to have any spectacular, diplomatic coups," the spokesman said.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will hold separate meetings on May 4 with Israeli Premier Benyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in the hope of kick-starting the process after more than a year of stalemate.

"The important thing is to keep them talking," the spokesman said, describing the talks as a workman-like affair not expected to result in "pyrotechnics and diplomatic fireworks." Earlier in the day a British diplomatic source said no direct meeting had been planned between the two leaders.

The meetings were proposed by Mr. Blair as a neutral venue during a visit to Israel earlier this month.

British representatives were not expected to take part in the talks, a British Foreign Office spokesman said, adding that "the Americans are taking the lead."

The talks are expected to focus on a four-point U.S. peace package calling for a staged Israeli withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank in tandem with Palestinian steps against anti-Israeli guerrillas.

The peace process has been stalled since Israel began building the contested Har Homa settlement in east Jerusalem at the start of 1997.

Israel tries to arrest Abbas

RAFAH (AFP) — Israeli border guards threatened to arrest a Palestinian notorious for the 1985 hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise liner in which an American Jew was killed, Palestinian security sources said Wednesday.

Mohammad Abbas, known by his nom de guerre Abu Al Abbas, and an aide were stopped by Israeli soldiers on Monday as they tried to cross the Rafah crossing from Egypt to Gaza, where he lives, said a Palestinian security official.

"Israeli security informed us that there is a political decision to prevent Abu Al Abbas from entering the Palestinian territories and to arrest him if he tries," said the official, who asked not to be named.

Palestinian security at Rafah said Abbas holds a so-called "VIP card," issued by the Palestinain National Authority and approved by Israel, which allows him to move freely through border crossings.

"The Israelis insisted on arresting him, so we closed the Rafah border for two hours in protest. After high-level political contacts, he and his aide were allowed to enter," said the official.

The Palestinian daily Al Ayyam said Palestinian police also formed a human shield around Mr. Abbas to prevent Israeli soldiers from detaining him.

Israeli border officials have tried twice in the past month to arrest Mr. Abbas as he crossed the Allenby Bridge from Jordan to the West Bank, the official said.

Mr. Abbas, head of the Palestinian Liberation Front, a small Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) faction, planned the October 1985 hijacking of the Italian cruise boat Achille Lauro, during which a paraplegic American tourist, Leon Kinghoffer, was murdered.

Among other attacks, his group also tried to land commandos on a beach south of Tel Aviv in May 1990. The fighters were immediately arrested, but when President Yasser Arafat refused to condemn the attempt, the United States cut off a nascent dialogue with the PLO.

Israel's previous Labour government allowed Mr. Abbas to return to Gaza in 1996 to attend a meeting of the PLO's "parliament," the Palestine National Council, which voted to amend the PLO charter to remove clauses calling for the destruction of Israel.

Rashid: New food plan ready in two or three weeks

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — A new "oil-for-food" arrangement, which allows sanctions-hit Iraq to sell oil to buy food and medicine, could come into effect in two or three weeks, Iraqi Oil Minister Amer Rashid said Tuesday.

He said Baghdad was finalising a distribution plan, which will need to be approved by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

But to date, the United Nations has not given the green light for the export to Baghdad of $300 million worth of spare parts needed to repair Iraqi oil installations damaged during the Gulf war.

Mr. Annan had asked the U.N. Security Council on April 15 to authorise the delivery of the spare parts to enable Iraq to export $4 billion worth of oil over the next six months.

The U.N. chief said at the time Iraq was not in a position to export the $5.2 billion worth of oil authorised by the Security Council on Feb. 20.

Independent oil experts who visited Iraq last month concluded that even if the repairs are carried out, Baghdad will not be able to export more than $3 billion worth of oil over six months starting in June.

A model showing summer clothes, a shirt and trousers made of satin, during the First Summer Show in Amman on Wednesday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

British foreign secretary 'applauds' changes in Iran

CAIRO (AFP) — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook heaped praise on the "pragmatic approach" of Iranian foreign policy under President Mohammad Khatami, in an interview published on Wednesday.

"We applaud the Iranian government's efforts to develop a civil society and institutionalise respect for the rule of law," Mr. Cook told the London-based Arabic daily Al Hayat, which is also published in Cairo and other Arab capitals.

"We also welcome the more pragmatic direction of Iran's foreign policy," Mr. Cook said, according to the English text of the interview.

The foreign secretary praised Mr. Khatami, a moderate cleric elected in May last year, for showing "interest in developing understanding between civilisations."

He also described recent visits to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain by former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as "signs that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Iran are starting to develop a closer understanding on security and other matters."

Mr. Cook said these "positive steps" convinced the European Union (EU) in February to resume dialogue with Iran after a ten-month break prompted by a German court verdict implicating Tehran's regime in the assassination of Kurdish opposition leaders in Berlin in 1992.

Britain, which currently holds the EU rotating presidency, is "liaising with the Iranian government over arrangements for a first meeting. I hope this will take place soon," Mr. Cook said.

But he expressed concern over Iran's record of "support to terrorism and its support for groups who use violence to subvert the Middle East peace process" and arms proliferation.

The British foreign secretary angered the Iranian leadership earlier this month with charges that it had attempted to buy British nuclear technology.

In a break with the secrecy traditionally surrounding Britain's security services, Mr. Cook said that the foreign intelligence service MI6 and the GCHQ communications monitoring agency had "tracked Iran's nuclear weapons programme and have enabled us to disrupt Iranian attempts to procure British technology."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi described the charges as "baseless" and said they were an attempt to cover up a row in Britain over the delivery of a consignment of Georgian nuclear waste.

Relations between Britain and Iran have been severely strained since the Islamic republic issued a death sentence against British author Salman Rushdie in 1989 over his book "The Satanic Verses," saying it was an insult to Islam.

Britain is represented in Iran by a charge d'affaires and not an ambassador, as is the case for all other members of the EU.

Mr. Cook spoke to Al Hayat on the eve of a meeting between officials from the EU and the GCC, which comprises Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The meeting, expected to take place in Brussels on Wednesday, is aimed at holstering ties between the two regional bodies as well as discussing Iran, Iraq and the Middle East peace process, Mr. Cook said.

Yemeni tribal negotiators attempt to free Britons

SANAA (AFP) — An influential Yemeni tribe has begun mediation efforts to win the freedom of a British family kidnapped by a neighbouring tribe, tribal officials said Tuesday.

"At the request of the authorities in Sanaa, Sheikh Mohammad Ben Jaji Al Ghader, chief of the Khawalan tribe, neighbours of the Bani Dabyan tribe which carried out the abduction, began mediating Tuesday," a Khawalan official said.

"Sheikh Ghader sent two representatives to try to convince them to unconditionally release the British hostages," the official, who asked not to be identified, said.

The sheikh "is an influential member of his tribe and is respected by other tribes in the region including the Bani Dabyan," he said.

Earlier mediation efforts "by Sanaa's governor, Mohammad Abdallah Al Sufi, failed," he said, without saying why.

British teacher David Mitchell, his wife Carolyn and their 14-year-old son Ben were taken hostage by armed tribesman April 16 while driving to Sanaa airport from the southern city of Aden.

David Pearce, deputy head of the British embassy, said the hostages were reported to be "safe and well."

Yemeni security forces have "tightened up the cordon sanitaire on the village" of Quradh where the hostages are being held in a rough, mountainous region near Dhamar in southeast Yemen, Mr. Pearce said.

The British government, meanwhile, has reiterated to the Yemeni authorities "that it wants a peaceful solution," said Mr. Pearce.

Mr. Mitchell, who works for the British Council, has twice sent faxes to the embassy. He has called on the authorities to act quickly to obtain their release.

The Mitchells' kidnappers had been on the point of releasing them last Friday, tribal sources said. But an argument between the tribesmen wanting government aid for their region prevented the release from going ahead.

'Clinton decision on Gulf forces expected soon'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — President Bill Clinton is expected to decide in the next couple of weeks whether to reduce U.S. military forces in the Gulf in response to easing tensions with Iraq, the Pentagon said.

Two U.S. aircraft carriers, some 37,000 U.S. troops, and scores of extra fighters and bombers have been tied down in the Gulf for more than five months by the confrontation over U.N. arms inspections in Iraq, causing strains for the U.S. military.

Besides costing more, the increased tempo of operations have created problems for the air force and the navy, which has been unable to keep carriers in the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific because of the crisis.

"The president will have to decide whether two carriers [in the Gulf] is the proper level or whether we would move down to a lower level," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon.

Mr. Bacon said he anticipated that Mr. Clinton would make a decision "in the next couple of weeks."

"I think he will look across the board at aircraft, ships and soldiers in the Gulf," Mr. Bacon said.

The spokesman said conditions in the Gulf were "somewhat less threatening" than they were when the crisis began last fall.

"Whatever decision the president makes in the next couple of weeks when he reviews this will be subject to change if conditions change," he said, adding that if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "refuses to remain peaceful and placid, we will build up our forces again if the circumstances call for that."

50 years later, Palestinians still look for relief from their 'catastrophe'

By Hisham Abdullah
Agence France Presse

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — Fifty years after losing the chance at a state, the Palestinians are still waiting not only for a political solution to their plight but for recognition of the "catastrophe" which shattered their lives.

"There can never be an end to this situation until there is an apology from Britain and Israel for what happened in the Nakba," said Ali Al Jarbawi, a political science professor in Beir Zeit University in the West Bank. "They have to admit a moral responsibility for what happened to the Palestinians," Prof. Jarbawi said.

"Nakba" — Arabic for "catastrophe" — is the term Palestinians use for the 1948 war, when Israeli army attacked the Palestinian civilians and left hundreds of thousands of them homeless

While Israel celebrates its creation during that war, Palestinians reflect on years of living without a nation, whether abroad as homeless refugees or under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967.

"We have lived for long decades in hopelessness and poverty caused by the Nakba which befell us," said novelist Ezzat Al Ghazawi.

Mr. Ghazawi's grandmother was killed in 1948 when Jewish troops shelled his family's village of Qaqun, whose ruins now lay outside the north Israel town of Natanya.

His son was later killed by Israeli soldiers during the 1987-1994 intifada uprising in the occupied territories.

"My father was left with deep scars by the death of my grandmother. Then I lost my son," said Mr. Ghazawi, who was born three years after the war and now heads the Palestinian Writers Union in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Palestinian despair has not been lifted by the peace process launched with Israel in 1993, which the Palestinians hope will lead to the creation of a state in the territories but which has come to a near complete standstill since Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu came into office in 1996.

"We have no power over anything in our hands. And our hopes of creating a Palestinian state are falling apart under the iron hand and the intransigence of Israel," Mr. Ghazawi said.

More than 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed in the 1948 war, and today the hundreds of thousands of refugees dispersed by the war into the territories and neighbouring Arab countries have swelled to some 3.5 million.

"The Palestinians inherit the Nakba generation after generation," said Hatem Abdul Qader, 42, a Jerusalem representative to the Palestinian Legislative council, whose family's home village of Salma was destroyed by soldiers during the war.

"I was not alive yet during the Nakba, but I carry everything which happened to us. And I'm afraid my son will carry the same heavy load," he said.

"The simplest way for me to say it is that the Nakba for us means loss. Loss of our nation, loss of our destiny, loss of any control over our future," Mr. Jarbawi said.

"Does a refugee in Lebanon or Amman or elsewhere have anything to say about what happens to him? We have no say either here" in the occupied territories, he said.

"We no longer have any control over our fate. We can't take any decisions on our own because everything has become a larger Arab or regional or international issue. All this is because of the Nakba," he said.

Italian bank robbers grab gold under police noses

VICENZA (R) — Armed robbers stole gold worth $1.4 million from an Italian bank on Tuesday, just 50 metres from the local police station, AGI news agency reported. The four, wearing ski masks, tied up staff at a branch of Banca Di Roma in Vicenza, northern Italy, and grabbed 130 kg. in gold ingots and 150 million lire in cash before making off by car.

Paper honours U.S. law day with 'Stupid Judge Tricks'

NEW YORK (R) — A legal newspaper is marking law day this week with a report on bizarre actions by judges that include biting a defendant, urinating on a carpet and throwing a firecracker into another jurist's office. In its latest weekly issue, the National Law Journal ran an article, which highlights its "top 10 list of the most amazing antics by judges." Among those cited a judge who apparently lost it at a bail hearing and made dental history along with the likes of boxer Mike Tyson, another judge, was accused with various misdeeds like urinating on a female colleagues' carpet, throwing a lighted firecracker into another judge's office, and signing orders with fictitious names like snow white.

Watch out Superman, here come the men in tights

LONDON (R) — Watch out Superman. Tights for men could be the new fashion statement of the nineties. A British hosiery firm is launching a new range of hosiery for men who feel comfortable enough about their masculinity to stride around in clinging tights like Shakespearean heroes or regency bucks. But women warn the tights could make the "new man" wearers hot and sweaty for all the wrong reasons and men fear their sperm count could fall. "We have had lots of calls at our head office in Austria and via the Internet expressing interest in men's tights," said the company spokeswoman.

Spelling loses to pregnant actress

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Producer Aaron Spelling lost his bid for a retrial over a $4.8 million judgement in favour of a pregnant actress he fired. Not only did judge Fumiko Wasserman rule against Spelling's request, but she also granted hunter Tylo $900,000 she demanded to cover her legal expenses during the trial. Tylo, 34, was fired in March 1996, one month after Spelling hired her to play a seductress in the popular television series "Melrose Place," when he found out she was pregnant. Tylo said through her lawyer Gloria Allred that she was pleased with the judge's decision confirming the Dec. 22 verdict.

Polanski elected to French Academy of Fine Arts

PARIS (AFP) — Movie director Roman Polanski has been elected to the French Academy of Fine Arts. Polanski, who was born in Paris in 1933, has directed many of the greatest names in cinema in a career spanning 40 years. His roll-call of films includes "Repulsion," starring Catherine Deneuve, "Chinatown" with Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway, "Death and the Maiden" with Sigourney weaver and "Frantic" with Harrison Ford. "Tess" won him a Golden Globe Award in 1980. He has also directed Isabelle Adjani, Mia Farrow and Emmanuelle Seigner.